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Lee Child: you can't teach writing How gardening saved Monty Don

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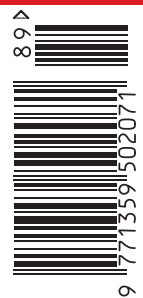
The Corona Wars

China, the US and the new
threat to democracy

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Editorial



Planet waves

Tom Clark

If the first duty of the state is the safety of its citizens, then something that puts in jeopardy the safety of citizens everywhere is bound to have a bearing on the standing of states around the world.

Sure enough, just three months on from the pandemic being declared, its geopolitical ramifications are being felt. Diplomats report that the reputation of “the west” is in freefall in those many Asian states that have contained the virus better. On the continent, from public health to border control and the single currency, the strains of the crisis will require EU member states to hang more tightly together with closer co-ordination—or otherwise hang apart. (Anu Bradford and Bruno Maçães debate which of these two directions it is likely to go on p28.) Most palpable of all, however, is the sense of Chinese power waxing while American power wanes.

Beijing has been able to protect its people from the new coronavirus far better than today’s abjectly dis-United States: as of June, the number of Covid-19 deaths per million Americans looks to be roughly 100 times that for every million Chinese. And as our outgoing deputy editor Steve Bloomfield explains in a magisterial valedictory essay (p16), President Xi’s regime has wasted no time in turning this relative success to propaganda advantage. As Donald Trump destroys alliances abroad, and incites violent division at home (and if you’re still scratching your head about what game he’s playing, Sam Tanenhaus does the electoral calculation on p48), the PR war is a breeze for the People’s Republic.

All this breeds a new assertiveness in China, which has already been keenly felt in Hong Kong where after long months of a fraught and grudging stand-off, Beijing has just moved to impose a new national security law by decree, making a mockery of the supposed “one country, two systems” settlement. Steve’s darkest fear is that a confluence of events—the suspension of civil liberties in the lockdown, Trump’s destruction of democratic mores, and China’s increasing plausibility as an authoritarian paradigm—could combine to trigger a catastrophic failure of nerve in the democracies. He insists that this must be resisted not only on principle, but also because—on a long view, and a broad canvas—liberal democracy is still the best system for running things that humanity has ever devised.

While Steve hankers for high-minded leadership and a new league of true democracies to transcend ugly alliances of convenience, Mark Leonard (on p24) admits to being impressed by the ruthless pragmatism of Europe’s new generation of rulers. Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz and Danish PM Mette Frederiksen are among those who have answered nativist populist forces, not by making a haughty stand for liberal values, but rather by stealing their thunder. Egotistical and impatient with diplomatic protocol, the rising statesmen and

women might look like leaders to doom the European project, but after so many lost referenda and so much sclerosis, Leonard concludes that the last best hope for multilateralism might just be politicians who have the cunning and guile to make the case for it in nationalist terms.

Well, let’s hope so. Because when it comes to pandemics—as everything in 2020 eventually does—there is ultimately no plausible alternative to working across borders.

That much is evident when we look back to the last big outbreak of a deadly virus. According to Katherina Thomas (p30), who spent time in Liberia as it picked up the pieces after Ebola, there are today heartening signs of co-ordination and the sharing of ideas across African communities and countries in ways which would appear to be checking the spread of Covid-19.

It is evident, too, if we try and look forward to the next great pestilence that will befall us. The bestselling historian Peter Frankopan has proven prognostic credentials, having accurately predicted a pandemic in our pages in early December last year. He returns on p34 with a terrifying dispatch about the many mishaps that occur in all the facilities around the world that are researching virology and bio-weapons—from flaming gas canisters in the Siberian lab that still holds the smallpox virus, to Dengue fever samples being popped in the British post. Most of these facilities are avowedly focused on national defence, but if—or perhaps we should say when—one of them finally loses control, the crisis will belong to the world as a whole.

“With pandemics, there is no sustainable alternative to working across borders”

And yet today human vulnerability is being preyed on for political and nationalist purposes. A few months after he had pushed the world to an existential brink in the Cuban missile crisis, a very different US president found the humility to speak these words: “our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children’s future. And we are all mortal.” Here’s hoping our own grandstanding politicians can muster a bit of JFK’s wisdom.

Tom Clark

🐦 @prospect_clark

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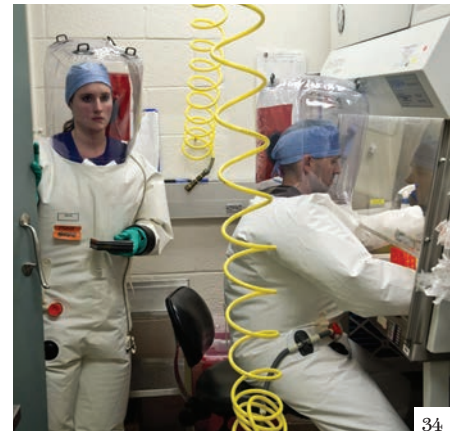
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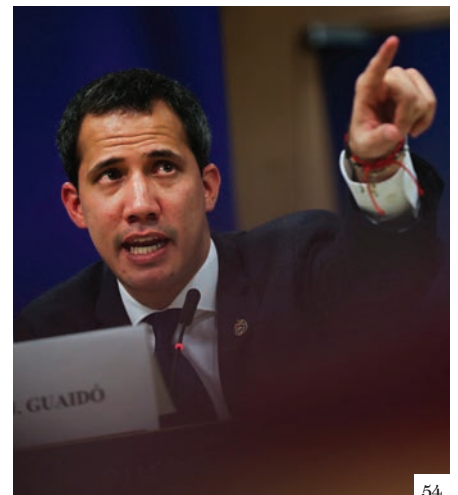
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Diane Roberts writes from the US on the aftermath of George Floyd's death

Philip Ball on the Covid-19 misinformation epidemic

Tristan McConnell on whether universal basic income could change aid forever

Peter Kellner on the joys of rewatching old elections

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November	8th October
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January	10th December

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Notice the kittens **p65**

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The new battle for democracy **p16**

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 "The Brussels Effect: How the European Union Rules the World" (OUP)
Could Covid-19 kill off the EU? **p28**

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 An Improvisation on Indian Music" will be published next year
While my sitar gently weeps **p70**

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The next pandemic **p34**

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Venezuela's two presidents **p54**

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 on Foreign Relations
Move fast and break things **p24**

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Mind the gender gap **p60**

Bruno Maçães is a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute and a former
 Europe minister of Portugal
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Azadeh Moaveni's "Guest House for Young Widows: Among the Women
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 non-fiction in 2019
Difficult questions **p67**

Emily Reynolds is the author of "A Beginner's Guide to Losing Your Mind"
 (Yellow Kite)
Breaking point **p44**

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American carnage **p48**

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The warning **p30**

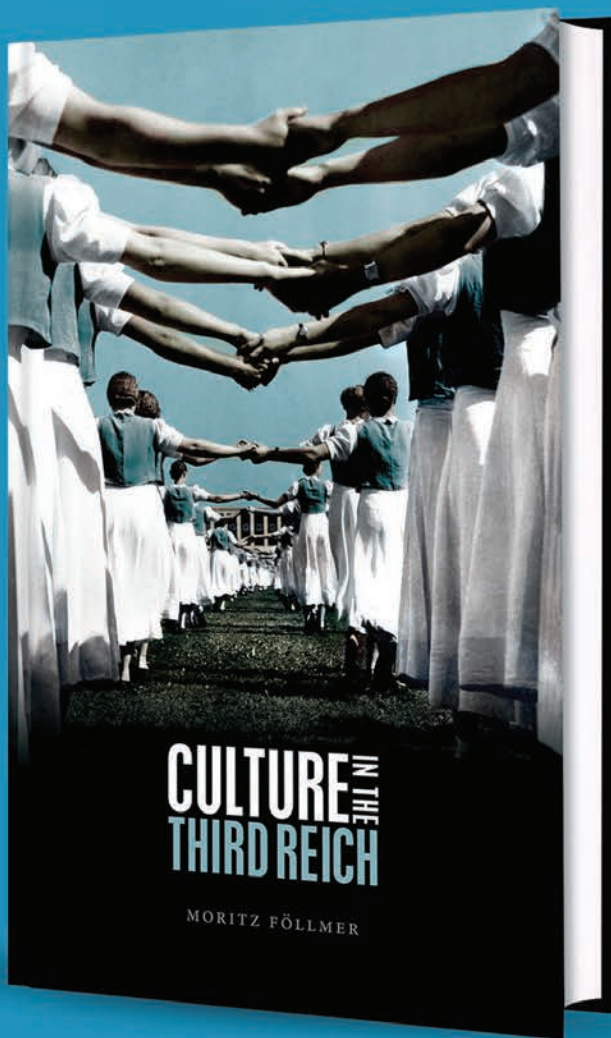
Alice Vincent is the author of "Rootbound: Rewilding a Life" (Canongate)
A rooted life **p38**

CULTURE IN THE THIRD REICH

MORITZ FÖLLMER

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Letters



Historian's prerogative

There is no crisis that a shrewd profession cannot turn to its advantage. Margaret MacMillan has shown herself time and again to be a master of her art. We are taught from childhood to “learn from history or else,” and as she rightly says, we sometimes do (“The dawn after the darkest hour,” June). But what does she mean in demanding we “use it wisely”? History is not a science, subject to peer-group review. It says merely: “Trust me, I am a historian.”

History has long been a banquet at which all can feast, left and right, democrat and dictator. Thus today, MacMillan feels she can already suggest that Covid-19 proves the worth of big government, dispels the “bugaboo of a deep state” and throws libertarians “on the defensive.” Suppose it “proves” the opposite? Suppose it shows the incompetence of big government institutions (as in the UK), the grotesque cost of one-size-fits-all overreaction and the validity of Sweden’s policy of mitigation and herd immunity? Suppose by then the politics of fear will have legitimised the greatest “deep state” intrusion on personal freedom in history? Just suppose.

Will she write that history?

Simon Jenkins, columnist and author

A brilliant and encouraging essay by MacMillan. International co-operation is indeed essential. MacMillan’s Canada and Britain have a long tradition of mutual support. My hero, the great Lord Haldane, gave his brilliant speech as lord chancellor on the subject of a “higher nationality” in Montreal in 1913. He went on to be the first minister to place a paper on the concept of a post-war league of nations before the cabinet in 1915.

Today, true statesmanship is rare. The crisis creates opportunities. If we grasp them, great things can be done—and great things done endure.

John Campbell, via the website

WHO is culpable?

As Ngairé Woods specifically mentions me (in the embarrassing company of Donald Trump) as a critic of the WHO, I should say I agree with a lot of her defence of the organisation (“Who is the WHO?” June). I have expressed my opposition to Trump’s intention to remove funding and recognise the essential work it is now doing.

It is of course difficult to run an international organisation when

China and the US, the two largest members, are such awkward customers. Nor should the WHO’s failings excuse the US and UK governments from their own.

But it is not good enough to say the WHO should be forgiven for passing on Beijing’s reassurances or ignoring Taiwan’s concerns because it needed China’s co-operation. It had a responsibility to warn that the evidence of human-to-human transmission was compelling and should be acted upon.

If the WHO had done that, all later co-operation with China might not have been so necessary. Moreover, Beijing has an increasing tendency to bully anybody (individuals, companies, international organisations) who doesn’t go along with its narrative. If this continues to be tolerated then international co-operation on all sorts of issues will soon become impossible.

Lawrence Freedman, King’s College London

More banknotes

The debate between Adair Turner and Paul Tucker is fascinating (“The Duel,” May). And it raises a fundamental issue: can/should

central banks take credit risk? And if so, how much?

In what used to be “normal times,” when interest rates were higher and there was room to decrease them, the rule was a clear “no”: the central bank moved the policy rate and let all other rates adjust freely. With the policy rate now so low, is it OK for the central bank to buy a range of assets in a way that reduces this spread, even if the spread reflects the worries of investors about the possibility of default? To be concrete: would it be OK if the European Central Bank fully eliminated the spread on Italian bonds? Why or why not? These are difficult questions—but we must seek to answer them.

Olivier Blanchard, former chief economist, IMF

Nationalism never works

One wonders how Anatol Lieven’s ideas will stand up in a post Covid-19 world, where the lesson we have learned, more than any other, is how interconnected we are (“The nation and the planet,” May).

To date the response of most ordinary people has been not to look inwards, but outwards. They have come together in myriad ways to care for one another, within and across borders.

Climate justice demands that we extend this same solidarity to all those most impacted by the climate crisis. Yes, governments are critical to this but if they, as Lieven suggests, appeal to nationalism, that will lead directly to “my country first.” Self-interested nationalism has not served countries like the US well in this pandemic. It won’t in tackling the climate crisis either.

Caroline Lucas, Green MP for Brighton Pavilion

The life you can save

Peter Singer suggests that when rationing life-saving resources, younger patients should be prioritised over older ones because they are expected to live longer after we help them (“The Duel,” June).

This justification, which maximises years of life from the life-saving point onward, differs from a

In fact

In 2019, 10.6m UK employees—33 per cent of the workforce—were in “key worker” occupations and industries.
Office for National Statistics

The record for the Cannonball Run (driving from New York to LA) has been beaten seven times in recent weeks, and now stands at 26 hours and 38 minutes.
Which Car, 15th May 2020

In May, the YouTube channel Cocomelon – Nursery Rhymes received over one billion views in one week, the first time this milestone has been reached.
TubeFilter, 18th May 2020

The pangolin is the world’s most trafficked mammal; globally, the bodies or scales of 370,000 illegally traded pangolins were seized between 2014 and 2018.
UN Office on Drugs and Crime

In the 2016 US elections, 33m or 24.4 per cent of the votes were cast by absentee ballot.
Electoral Vote, 25th May 2020

No babies were born to UK prime ministers between 1850 and 2000. Three have been born since.
@wikipedia, 11th May 2020

In over 70,000 rounds of golf played on the PGA tour last season, only 38 shots were holes in one.
Inside Hook, 14th May 2020

In Irish, Dublin translates to *Dubh Linn*, which means “Black Pool.”
IrelandBeforeYouDie.com



“Not Ofsted again!!”

possible rationing alternative based on a fair distribution of total years of life. That is, fairness between morally equal people could mean giving some priority to providing additional years of life to the person who will have had the fewest years if he dies (on this policy, those who are older now would have benefited if it had been applied when they were young). This could imply saving a 30-year-old who would live another 10 years rather than a 60-year-old who would live another 20 years.

Both fairness and maximising outcome approaches must explain whether infants should be favoured over 30-year-olds for reasons like those outlined above, or whether there are additional factors to consider.

Frances Kamm, philosopher

Stay alert

David Allen Green is right to highlight the extraordinary powers given to the executive on 26th March ("Criminalising ordinary life," June). The statutory basis for the unhappily drafted regulations is uncertain. Parliament should have quickly reviewed the package and put it on sound footing. That view is shared by Stephen Laws (past first parliamentary counsel), writing for Policy Exchange. However, it would have helped to explain that the regulations were

to lapse unless there was an affirmative resolution within 28 sitting days. Indeed, on 12th May, the first substantial relaxations were introduced. But we must remain alert and questioning.

Guy Sandhurst, former Bar Council chairman

Crowns and hounds

In your history of meetings with the great and good ("The way we were," June) Samuel Pepys describes riding in a barge with Charles II and his son, and discovering that "the more a man considers and observes them, the less he finds of difference between them and other men."

It wasn't the first time he'd found himself in a boat, forced to notice the king's feet of clay. Five years earlier, when Charles returned from exile to claim the English throne, the triumphant party came ashore in two landing crafts. The king was in one. In the other was Pepys, babysitting Charles's over-excited lapdog. "I went... with a dog that the King loved, (which dirtied the boat, which made us laugh, and me think that a King and all that belong to him are but just as others are.)"

John Phipps, North Yorkshire

Free to sleep badly

Finally, an article that lets us strike an item off the tyrannical,

ever-lengthening list of things at which we must try harder. Barbara Speed's sane investigation into our self-defeating obsession with slumber ("In search of sleep," July) shows how the pursuit of the magical—and not altogether scientific—eight hours a night has spawned an industry extending far beyond overpriced mattresses, with publishers, app developers and candlemakers all scrambling to cash in. Far better than offering a cure of her own—most of which, she says, are only temporary—Speed gives us permission to sleep badly. What kind of a person would you be if you weren't tossing and turning in 2020?

Hephzibah Anderson, Prospect columnist

Clarking error

For the last two editions, each offering on your letters pages has taken two or three lines of bold type to evidence the qualification of the writer to dare to communicate with you. Previous editions had a better ratio of "ordinary" people. For the record I have been variously a bank clerk, a transport manager, a prison inmate and now a jobbing gardener. I fear these may all be disqualifications. But Tom, there is a word missing from the ninth line of the penultimate paragraph in your June editorial!

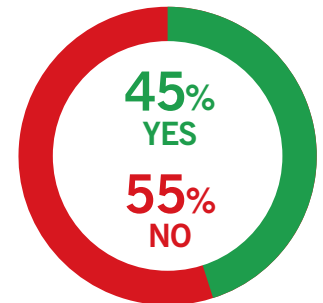
John Mayberry, Devon



The Duel

Last month *Peter Singer* and *Lucy Winkett* debated whether it is more important to save the lives of the young.

Readers said:



This month read *Bruno Maçães* vs *Anu Bradford* on whether Covid-19 could kill off the EU.

See p28

Letters should be sent by email to letters@prospect-magazine.co.uk. Please include your full name and address. Letters may be edited

Stephen Collins



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Opinions



The revenge of truth

Rafael Behr

Boris Johnson's dalliance with the science has ended, like most of his relationships, in acrimony. When he backed Dominic Cummings instead of the lockdown rules, Johnson abandoned any claim to rigour in his pandemic response. At the same time, he also squandered a precious moment of rapprochement between politics and facts.

A national emergency usually has a sobering effect on debate, but the threat from a microscopic virus achieved something more profound. It twisted the lens to focus on a level of empirical reality that had been invisible in the preceding years of hyper-partisan frenzy, when any notion of established truth seemed lost in a fog of culture war. A virus cannot be campaigned against or sidelined by intrigue. It resists all the techniques that brought Johnson to power and he seemed, for a while, genuinely chastened by it. Maybe the shock of a scientific challenge—the revenge of hard facts—will have some more durable corrective effect on wider politics, if not him.

The contrast with Brexit, the dominant issue before the pandemic, is profound. Many Remainers believed they were holding a line for reality against a barrage of fake news. They deployed experts—economists, diplomats, trade specialists. Leavers dismissed them as agents of a foreign plot against sovereignty. As the ultimate victor in that battle, Johnson was reviled by the vanquished side as a populist, a monstrous creature of the new “post-truth” era, Britain's Trump.

The pandemic is a different type of crisis. Arguments over Brexit came down to rival concepts of Britain's future. They could never be settled by scientific measurement. There is no “R” number for the spread of identity politics, but a virus has quantifiable risks. It also has no campaign advocates. It gets help from complacency and from conspiracy, but dangerous ideas about 5G signals causing sickness are not endorsed by mainstream British parties. UK government advisers have been spared the indignity inflicted on US counterparts, watching Trump advocate bleach ingestion as a possible remedy.

There are disputes about policy—how far, or not, to lock down—fuelled by culture warrior prejudices. But there is consensus on the metrics. We do not yet know enough about transmission or immunity. That leaves ambiguities that allow some to insist the data favours lighter-touch quarantine while others see grounds for caution in the same numbers. There is attention-seeking and paranoia on the fringes, but the two Westminster camps are mostly trading in the same scientific currency, focused on common aspiration to get to the truth. In that sense, Covid politics uses facts in an old-fashioned sense of the word—demonstrable and universally accepted. Left and right biases have not been banished, but there are people on both sides drilling towards the same verifiable core of evidence.

“Covid politics uses facts in an old-fashioned sense of the word—demonstrable and universally accepted”

Does that represent a durable shift in political culture? Much will depend on the American presidential election in November. The US exerts a powerful gravitational pull on the UK. There will be very different trajectories for Johnson depending on whether they see the inauguration of Joe Biden or a second term of Trump. The latter will offer sinister lessons in what is available to an incumbent prepared to incinerate democratic norms and set himself in flagrant defiance of the truth. No one doubts that Cummings is capable of applying that lesson in the UK, and few expect Johnson to rein him in.

In the pandemic response, Downing Street still notionally defers to science, although the medical advisers themselves have been humiliated by shambolic messaging. Johnson has made it clear, by implication, that evidence is subordinate to Cummings, who is subordinate to no one. But it turns out the British public still holds truth in high esteem. Cummings's slippery

excuses provoked outcry that took the Tory party aback. Perhaps there will be a lingering cultural legacy from the promotion of science to the frontline, even if it was then demoted. Something appeared to change in the debate during the truce between Johnson and the experts, when the chief medical officer was more prominent than cabinet ministers, and epidemiological models made front-page news. Johnson's usual shtick of frivolity and play-acting was suspended.

Is it naive to hope that a residue of seriousness—the quality we might call factfulness—remains when the pandemic recedes? Post-truth politics is marked by the separation of information into discrete camps. Rival tribes do battle with arsenals of customised “fact.” The more explosive the claim, the truer it seems to its partisans.

Pandemic politics demands a different approach. When research undertaken in a spirit of open-minded curiosity confirms a new fact, the equation changes, as it always should have done. But more than that, responding to the virus requires politics to renew its accommodation with uncertainty: the choices involved are trade-offs. There is, for example, a tension between the need for a functioning economy and the need to prevent transmission. There is a wider lesson here we would do well to relearn—and we just might. Democratic politics is rarely a matter of locating the easy win-win solution. It is usually an exercise in finding the reasonable balance of risk and collective reward. That is another truth that might be a little better understood in the context of Covid-19.

We have an opportunity to move beyond relativism towards politics that recognises truth as something that takes time and care to assemble from evidence, and to recognise, too, the truth that most policy solutions will always be imperfect compromises. As a society we can internalise these lessons, or recoil from them because false certainty is more comforting. Such is the choice that coronavirus lays bare for us. The stakes are high, when one path could lead to a rehabilitation of liberal democracy and the other to its ruin.

Rafael Behr is a Guardian columnist



The Covid race riddle defies skin-deep simplicities

Angela Saini

On 8th February, in the early days of the pandemic, a far-right American website posted the headline: “STILL No Non-Chinese Deaths from coronavirus.” It claimed that Chinese people were so biologically exceptional that a virus originating in Wuhan couldn’t possibly infect white people in Europe, even if it reached that far. This nugget of nonsense barely survived a month before being comprehensively debunked by the spread of Covid-19 through Italy and then western Europe.

We may be united in our vulnerability, but as the crisis has rolled on, we have seen more and more strange speculation around human difference, part of it fed by the idea that the races are so distinct that some are innately more susceptible than others.

Early on, one widely-circulated notion held that black people were naturally immune to the virus. That melted away as people of black and minority ethnic backgrounds began to die in disproportionate numbers in the United States and the UK: by May it was reported that African Americans constituted half of coronavirus deaths in Chicago, despite being less than a third of the population. Suddenly, the narrative switched to the possibility that black people were innately *more* vulnerable.

Rarely have racial myths risen and fallen so quickly. The habit of forming myths in the first place has deep roots in the scientific racism of 19th-century Europe, when slavery and colonialism were justified by the assumption that non-white people were biologically inferior: white slaveowners claimed that black slaves felt less pain than they did. But even today, many people—including scientists—are not beyond leaping to assumptions of racial difference.

In early April, prominent medical researchers told the Science Media Centre that genetic differences in race, a socially-defined category if ever there was one, might account for the emerging race gap among the casualties. In early May, this idea had become so popular that I found myself having to reassure a British Asian dentist who got in touch to ask if his genes might make it unsafe for him to return to work. Another unsubstantiated theory posited that Vitamin D deficiencies might be compromising the immune systems of those with darker skin, accounting for the gaps in virus deaths.



Risks on the frontline: ethnic minorities make up almost half of NHS medical staff

One of the problems with drawing snap conclusions during a pandemic is that data changes dramatically from month to month. In South Korea in February, for example, a 61-year-old woman inadvertently infected dozens after attending church services, wildly skewing the country’s infection rates.

When it comes to minorities in the UK, the sharply disproportionate number of black and Asian deaths near the beginning of the crisis declined as the virus spread from London (a city in which white Britons are a minority) to the rest of the country (in which they are a large majority). By early June, four of the worst-affected regions were relatively deprived parts of the northeast, including Sunderland, which was 96 per cent white British at the last census. Public Health England data released on 30th April showed that, overall, the proportion of white deaths from Covid-19 was 82.9 per cent of the total death toll. But by the end of May this had climbed to 86.3 per cent. Clearly, we need to exercise care in analysing moving figures.

That said, the average age of white Britons is higher, and the age-adjusted mortality figures really do suggest that ethnic minorities have so far borne a disproportionate toll. But what then is the least-speculative reason as to why?

Demographics are surely key. Ethnic minorities make up almost half of NHS med-

ical staff. Frontline workers such as bus and delivery drivers and cleaning staff also come disproportionately from less well-off, minority backgrounds. Minorities more often live in poorer conditions, including overcrowded housing, which affects underlying health and patterns of infection. There are cultural factors, too, depending on which community you belong to, affecting patterns of social mixing and gathering. In the US, black Americans have waited until they are more severely ill before going to hospital, possibly because of the high costs of healthcare. And this is before considering racial discrimination in the healthcare system.

Coronavirus is laying bare society’s schisms—underlying disparities that make some individuals statistically more vulnerable. Whether the issue is poor living conditions that give rise to the sorts of underlying health problems that are associated with poor Covid-19 outcomes, or working in a frontline job without proper protective equipment, there are myriad factors here which certainly correlate with race—but they also overlap with many other demographic categories, including class, gender and poverty.

Much of this is tricky and uncomfortable territory, even for experts. There’s a desperation for crude, simple explanations for the gaps that are seen, rather than calm, measured analysis that accounts for all the complexities. The government itself got into a tangle on the day it was supposed to release a report about the excess deaths of minority Britons—there was a delay, reportedly because of “worries” around “current global events,” possibly a euphemism for protests in the US over the death of George Floyd, and then later another row about evidence some said had been omitted.

But any report was bound to be limited. When you begin to tally everything properly, you realise that it’s almost impossible to account for all the variables that might make some people statistically more vulnerable than others. The job of science here is to account for all external factors until we are left with what can only be biology. The problem is, no researcher has anywhere near the information needed for such exhaustive analysis. We are edging closer to a vaccine for Covid-19. Finding a cure for society’s complex webs of disadvantage will take longer.

Angela Saini’s book “*Superior: the Return of Race Science*” is published by 4th Estate



Schumpeter's virus: how creative destruction could save the Covid economy

Barry Eichengreen

You don't have to be an economist to see that Covid-19 has stopped much of the economy in its tracks, or to wonder when it will bounce back. But there is also the question of what, once the economy settles into its new normal, that new normal will look like.

When economists think about this sort of question, they start with the concept of "potential growth"—that is, how quickly the economy is capable of growing without inflation or other worries. This concept is crucial for understanding how living standards will develop in the future.

The crisis will influence potential growth through four channels, three negative and one positive. That there is bad news is no surprise: it will interrupt schooling, depress public investment and destroy global supply chains. These multiple negatives are immutable and immediate—they are baked in.

But if we make the right policy choices, they could be offset through the process that the Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter referred to as "creative destruction." He was writing in the aftermath of the Great Depression, which—like the virus today—did an excellent job of advancing the destruction part of the equation. The urgent question then, as now, was what could be created to replace what was being destroyed. And in all the disruption of existing industries, Schumpeter discerned the opening up of space for innovative new entrants.

Some of the innovation is easy to see coming, and likely already on the way. There is an added impetus for the application of AI, robotics and other new technologies to sectors where close contact is problematic. Just as Amazon is training AI-powered robots to pack orders in its warehouses, processors and distributors in sectors where infection is a special concern, such as meat-packing, will surely now move in the same direction.

In the months since the virus was detected, finance, retail and certain health services have all substantially moved online. In many cases, the changes will endure, because the role of Covid-19 has not been to bring forward improvised fixes from out of the blue, but rather to give economic history a nudge in the direction in which it was already going. Take online shopping virgins, who—during the lockdown—have lost their digital innocence. They may not entirely



Joseph Schumpeter spied opportunity amid the ruin of the Great Depression

abandon the corner shop, but neither will they abandon their computer screens after the habit has been acquired. Now that doctors and nurses have learned what kind of symptoms can be diagnosed over Skype, there will be a permanent reduction, though not a total elimination, of GP visits.

These changes will not be to everyone's liking. But new practices will enable medics to diagnose and treat more patients at lower cost to society. Properly measured, they will constitute an increase in productivity and a contribution to growth.

Counterintuitively, productivity regularly accelerates after crises, since they produce creative destruction. The 1930s saw the Great Depression, but were also the 20th-century decade in which the US recorded its fastest productivity growth, as old sectors, such as the railways, shed redundant workers and dynamic new industries, commercial trucking for example, ramped up activity. The timing of Schumpeter's idea was no coincidence. It may seem indecent to suggest there could eventually be some advantageous consequences of huge layoffs, but then again, if there was ever a time for a glimmer of hope, this is it.

This potential for creative destruction creates a sharp dilemma, however. Public

policy has sought to keep firms alive into the summer in the hope that they will somehow be able to resume business as usual in the autumn. The British government plans on maintaining its furlough scheme, albeit with a phased-in employer contribution, at least until October.

This approach keeps viable businesses intact. It preserves good matches between employers and employees—matches that took time to establish. And it is the quickest way of getting people back to work—if the firms in question survive.

But preserving existing matches accomplishes nothing if those matches are rendered worthless by the pandemic. Workers are going to have to move out of hospitality, travel and retail, since those sectors may never fully recover. Regardless of policy, many firms will eventually close. Fewer people will be taking business trips, cruises or shopping excursions while those activities remain unsafe. Even once they are again safe (whenever that is), habits will have changed now that we have all discovered Zoom and Microsoft Teams.

We therefore *want* the mix of jobs to change. Some—say, hotel receptionists—should retrain as, say, healthcare workers. But the more generously governments pay hotel chains to maintain their payroll, the less the immediate need (or reward) for doing that retraining there will be, and the longer the whole process will take.

Many initially assumed the coronavirus crisis would be short and followed by a "V-shaped" recovery, which meant it made sense to protect jobs. Now we can be sure that many of those jobs will—and should—permanently disappear, it makes more sense to protect the worker. This means providing him or her with generous unemployment benefits and tuition subsidies. It means using public resources to ramp up training in healthcare, homecare, and other expanding sectors while resisting predictable calls for austerity.

There are good reasons, from simple compassion to the inefficiency of bankruptcy, to support employers through a degree of payroll subsidy. It is neither desirable nor efficient for every pub and restaurant to disappear due to the behavioural changes wrought by Covid-19. Only some of them.

Barry Eichengreen is professor of economics and political science at the University of California, Berkeley



AT LAW

A clash of the reasonable

Schona Jolly

Lockdown raises legal questions which “common sense,” British or otherwise, cannot determine. A government whose grip is visibly faltering naturally pretends things are easy. But as it unlocks the economy, tricky new questions will arise, especially in the employment arena, where employees and employers are making practical choices with potentially dramatic consequences on both sides.

Bewilderment and fear are to be expected in a pandemic, and the government’s rapidly-changing guidance and lack of transparency does little to build the trust that is so important for engendering co-operative attitudes in the workplace. Facing multiplying financial, physical and psychological strains, both employers and employees will need to turn to law to identify their rights and obligations—but the law does not yet provide either with the clear answers they might expect. The stage is therefore set for a clash of entirely reasonable but different perspectives.

The re-opening of workplaces will test to the limit existing employment laws, which were not designed to deal with this pandemic. Take the phrase “health and safety,” which for most people brings the prevention of one-off accidents to mind—ensuring, say, helmets are worn to protect against falling masonry. Now it must permeate everything we do in our personal and our working lives. Indeed, for many, the distinction between the two is less clearly drawn than before the virus.

Employers retain all their legal duties, including those pursuant to health and safety legislation, employment and equality laws and whistleblowing. But without robust enforcement, workforces will harbour doubts about whether they are being properly protected. And robust enforcement works in two ways—through a tough health and safety regulator, and delivery of justice in a smoothly functioning employment tribunal system. Both avenues, under-resourced before, are even more strained now.

Confusion is likely to cloud one question above all others—that of who *must* and who *may* stay away from workplaces. A considerable number of workers will likely remain absent through self-isolation and illness, and

the new track-and-trace system—requiring isolation for anyone who has come into contact with the infected—will redouble that strain for employers. But for those employees who are currently fit, there are other difficulties. Serious concerns may relate to commutes, if there is no reasonable alternative to public transport, as well as the workplace itself. Their safety will rely on the protocols and vigilance of employers. But after long weeks of closure, many employers will be desperate to reopen. How will they react to an employee who is not absent due to sickness, but rather (possibly justified) anxiety about picking up the virus at or on the way to work?

“Re-opening workplaces will test our employment laws to the limit”

What makes sense to an employee may not make sense to an employer, and vice-versa. Even if the former has followed guidelines on social distancing, the latter may still fear for their safety. An employer may be entirely justified in asking that an employee return to work, in accordance with their contractual duty, while an employee may fear that they, or their loved ones, will be unacceptably exposed. So we may well find ourselves in the situation where an instruction is likely to be reasonable, and the refusal may also be reasonable. In employment law terms, that leaves both decent employers and fearful employees with difficult choices. Common sense does not, sadly, pay wages to employees nor perform work for employers. Where inevitable uncertainties arise, the law must therefore define the parameters.

The letter of the Employment Rights Act is not likely to resolve all such cases. While provision is made for employees to claim they have been unlawfully subjected to a detriment on health and safety grounds, or for automatic unfair dismissal, these provisions are not clear-cut, and are of course untested in pandemic circumstances.

And there are no comparable protections for many workers on insecure terms. Our precarious labour market rests on a great deal of

temporary and agency work, many zero-hour contracts and the gig economy. The grave crisis in care homes gives a stark warning of just how exposed insecure workers can be, as well as a foretaste of wider problems ahead.

Many equality challenges also loom. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has found mothers are more likely to have quit or lost their job, or been furloughed, during lockdown. Compared with fathers, they are spending less time on paid work and more on household responsibilities. With huge uncertainty over school openings and the availability of childcare, the prime minister’s vague vow to do “whatever it takes to help get women back into work” will not make a practical difference to employers in need of staff, or mothers unable to work because they have no childcare. Given the limits of current legal protections, investment to remedy this is plainly essential. Some emergency moves have actually gone in the wrong direction—such as the free pass given to employers on the gender pay gap this year. As well as restoring transparency as a priority, there is a strong case for reconsidering positive action provisions to ensure women are not left behind.

Protections relating to whistleblowers are likely to require emergency reinforcement. At a time when workers may be exposed in a variety of ways, supporting those able to come forward in a range of matters, from a potential plethora of furlough-related fraud challenges to health and safety dangers, is crucial for the benefit of wider society as well as workplaces. Employment tribunals are already clogged, and while interim relief measures *may* be available, access to justice could be delayed. In order to get through a tricky interim, creative measures may be required, such as re-purposing HMRC’s tax-reporting machinery or enhancing the Equality and Human Rights Commission’s role.

The challenges, then, are daunting. It is not “common sense,” but widescale expert consultation that is required to help worried workers and stricken workplaces. Looming on the horizon, though, is a Brexit battle relating to deregulation of labour rights. Never could the timing be worse.

Schona Jolly is an equality and human rights barrister at Cloisters



SPOTLIGHT ON CHINA

Great power play at Himalayan heights

Raffaello Pantucci

In the late summer of 2017, I was sat in the sumptuous lobby of one of Beijing's luxury hotels with a Chinese military contact, catching up about current events over tea and cakes. A dust-up between China and India over Doklam, a plateau high in the disputed mountain ranges that China shares with India and Bhutan, was winding down, with both Beijing and New Delhi eager to calm tensions. With a dismissive wave my Chinese colleague said it did not really matter anyway as "winter is coming and it will resolve the situation. The Indian soldiers are old, while our PLA [People's Liberation Army] boys are young and fit."

This image of a vigorous China and creaky India is one that Beijing loves. Both may be rising Asian powers, but China is leaps and bounds ahead of India economically. And it is hard not to form such an impression from a visit to the respective capital cities. Beijing is a booming metropolis where the old has been swept away for the new. Giant glass skyscrapers loom over a crowded web of concrete. In contrast, New Delhi is green and dusty, with unfinished or ageing construction linked by bumpy and poorly marked roads.

But it was India's desire to improve its infrastructure that set off the latest flare up between the two nations in May. The construction of a road on the Indian side of the disputed Line of Actual Control (LAC) led to a Chinese reaction, with Chinese soldiers suddenly appearing to pick fights with their Indian counterparts at various points on the disputed border.

Stones, sticks and punches were thrown with some reports suggesting that soldiers on both sides had to be evacuated due to their injuries.

The state-controlled Chinese press downplayed the incident, blaming the Indians for trying to change the situation on the ground. The more vibrant Indian media was full of chatter, with retired Indian officials competing with guesstimates as to how many Chinese soldiers had invaded Indian territory. A row over a road has now turned into the most serious flare-up between the two powers in years.

The question is, why? India and China are not natural allies, but both realise there are economic benefits to be had by working together. As Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi put it, "the Chinese 'dragon' and the Indian 'elephant' must not fight each other, but dance with each other. In that case, one plus one will equal not only two, but also eleven."

The answer is likely to be found in the China that Xi Jinping has been building—a country that sees itself as a strong and leading power on the world stage; that no longer feels it needs to bow down to others and is able to stand up to the omnipotent United States. This helps explain China's aggressive push out in every direction—menacing Taiwan, asserting itself over Hong Kong, strengthening maritime claims in the South China Sea—and the combative "wolf warrior" diplomacy that has captured international imagination.

Xi has telegraphed his intent a number of times. At an Army Day celebration in 2017, he told gathered military lead-

ers: "Today, we are closer to the goal of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation than any other time in history, and we need to build a strong people's military now more than any other time in history."

The current standoff is the end product of this aggressive mood and a desire to lash out in the wake of Covid-19. What is perhaps most worrying is that it is not certain whether Beijing was aware of the details of the attack until it had happened. While it is unlikely that PLA commanders in China's south would have the temerity to launch an attack against their neighbour without orders, it is possible they pushed further than their bosses may have initially intended. Given the low regard they have for Indian forces, a quick prod across a disputed border would both show Beijing they were doing their bit while also reminding the Indians of their dominance in the region.

The problem is the ill will that is generated. As Tanvi Madan, an expert at the Brookings Institution, put it, even before the current clash "anti-China sentiment has gone mainstream" in India. An app that promised to remove all Chinese apps from a smartphone was downloaded 4.7m times in just five days in India before it was banned by Google.

China has likely strengthened the hands of its enemies over its southwestern border. This is an entirely unnecessary outcome that is mostly the product of Beijing's arrogance towards Delhi and the hubristic mood that President Xi has been fostering.

Raffaello Pantucci is a senior associate fellow at the Royal United Services Institute



The dragon and the elephant: Chinese and Indian counterparts meet for border talks, left, over a skirmish in the disputed Doklam region, right

Speed data

Age-old truths

SEB BACON

As the lockdown loosens, the idea of somehow shielding “the vulnerable” is much discussed. But deciding who counts as vulnerable is fraught. In particular, many healthy and active older people bristle at the description—and especially at the idea of rules or advice that could condemn them, but not others, to stay at home.

The only case for any such discrimination must turn on relative risk. From the first reports from Wuhan, it has been vaguely said that Covid-19 is especially lethal to the “old and frail,” but it wasn’t possible to disentangle what that meant. Was the issue age itself or the conditions which, for many, tend to come along with it?

But working through OpenSAFELY (a new secure health analytics platform for the pandemic, led by Ben Goldacre and Liam Smeeth), our team of 30 researchers has been able to crunch 17m anonymised GP records, including those of 5,000+ people who had died in hospital with Covid-19 by 25th April. In this trove of NHS data, we can pinpoint the factors that ramp up the risks.

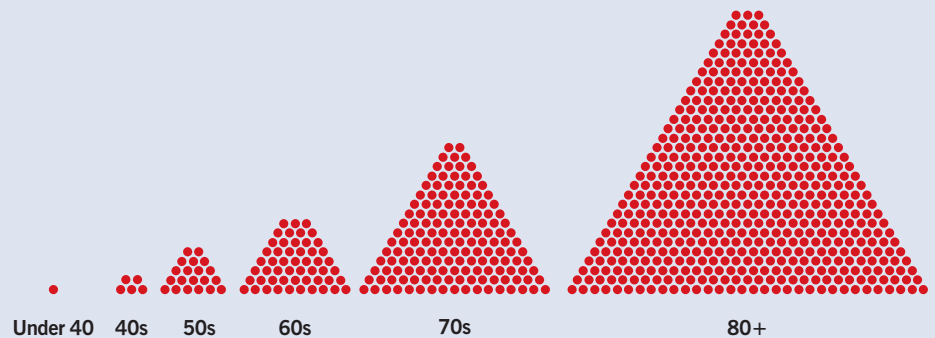
Age is huge, with—as the first chart shows—the over-80s being over 500 times more likely to die than the under-40s. Also highly significant, though, are several specific conditions such as those listed on the second chart, most of which are much more common among the elderly. Even with all of them (and several others not shown here) adjusted for, chart three shows the oldest were *still* 181 times more likely to die of Covid-19 than the under-40s. Some of that might be accounted for by conditions we have not measured. But it’s hard to escape the conclusion that being old is, in itself, the most important “underlying condition” of the lot. **12**

SOURCE: OPENSAFELY “FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH COVID-19-RELATED HOSPITAL DEATH IN THE LINKED ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORDS OF 17 MILLION ADULT NHS PATIENTS”

1 Rocketing risk by age

The raw chance of the oldest adults in England having died in hospital with Covid-19 by 25th April was over 500 times as great as that for those under 40

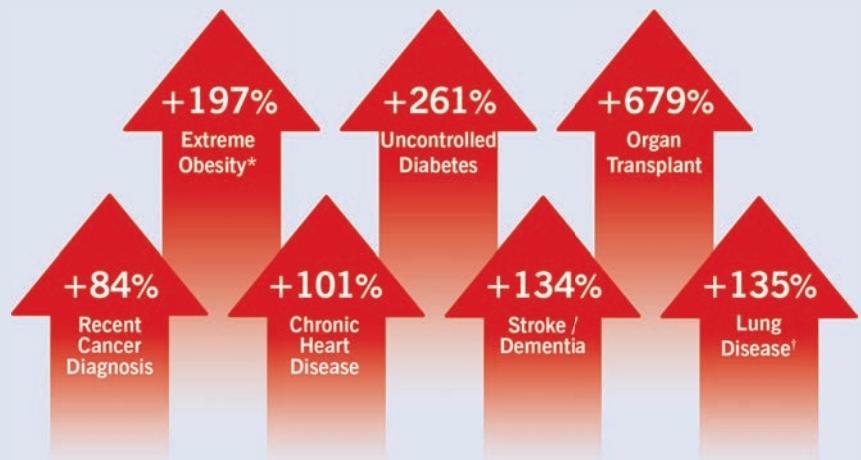
Relative risk for English adults, by age group



2 “Underlying conditions”

It’s not news that older adults on average have more diseases—and flab—than the young. And all this feeds into the vulnerability of the old

Increase in relative risk associated with specific conditions

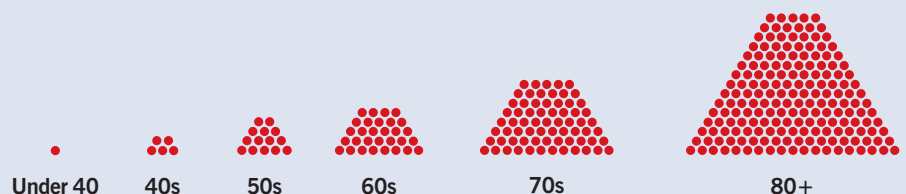


* BMI GREATER THAN 40
† EXCLUDING ASTHMA

3 Beyond control

Adjusting for these conditions makes quite a difference: the excess risk for the old over the young drops by more than half. But it is still vast, with the oldest adults now 181 times more vulnerable than the under-40s

Relative risk by age group, after adjusting for various underlying conditions and social indicators



The new battle for democracy

Coronavirus has upended the world order and called basic liberal values into question.

With authoritarianism on the rise, can democracy as we know it survive?

STEVE BLOOMFIELD



The announcement that democracy had been suspended in the United Kingdom was the seventh item on the BBC *News at Ten* on 13th March. The year-long postponement of around 120 local elections, including the mayoralities of London, the West Midlands and Greater Manchester, was mentioned in passing, with no voices raised in opposition. The last time elections had been postponed for longer than a month was during the Second World War.

Two weeks later, the prime minister's declaration that all citizens must stay at home, with the warning that police forces would fine those refusing to comply, was made in advance of any vote by MPs. The Coronavirus Act, rammed through parliament two days later, included a swathe of new powers for the state over the citizen.

If you wanted to protest these decisions the most you could do was write a letter or sign a petition. For the first two months of lockdown, we were barred from meeting anyone outside our own household—the right to hold a demonstration was effectively suspended.

That such decisions could take place in a liberal democracy would have been unimaginable just a few short months ago. That those decisions had the overwhelming support of the population make this moment stranger still. Our entire way of life was changed, by fiat, and we accepted it.

It happened in other democracies too—indeed in almost every democracy around the world, and almost every member of the European Union. And as the lockdowns are eased, they are being replaced by mass surveillance. In return for the freedom to step outside their homes, citizens are allowing their governments to know where they are, who they have met and the state of their health—phone data, credit card payments, CCTV have all been used to track law-abiding citizens. Politicians have discussed the idea of “immunity passports,” dividing populations into those who are free and those who are not. One of the tech companies consulted by the UK government has suggested the use of “facial biometrics.” The idea of governments tracking us through our movements, our phones, even our faces—proposals once seen as the preserve of paranoid dictatorships—have become acceptable; or, at the very least, the lesser of two evils.

In fragile democracies, Covid-19 has provided an excuse for an authoritarian turn. In Kenya, hundreds have been rounded up and placed in quarantine for such breaches as not wearing masks. In Malaysia, authorities have sought out and detained undocumented migrants on the pretext of fighting the virus. In Turkey, the government has detained hundreds of people for “provocative and abusive” social media posts—or, as you or I would put it, criticising the government's response. Perhaps most shockingly, in Hungary—a member of the European Union—Prime Minister Viktor Orbán introduced new legislation with no sunset clause that allows him to rule by decree, effectively turning the country into a dictatorship, unless he personally chooses to relinquish those powers.

The steps that democratic governments across the world have taken to protect us from Covid-19 have deprived us of our liberty, increased the power of the police, and reduced the power of our elected parliaments. To save lives in our liberal democracies we have become—and in some respects could well remain—illiberal and undemocratic.

At the same time, China—the antithesis of a liberal democracy—is proclaiming victory, arguing that its swifter, tougher measures have not only shown how to successfully combat Covid-19 but also demonstrated the merits of a more effective model for governing.

This is a global crisis, met by more than 200 different national responses. Since the end of the Second World War, liberal democracies have proclaimed that their form of governance is superior to anything else. Covid-19 is a bracing test of whether we were right.

1

Democracies versus dictatorships—a tale of two countries, or 200?

“We should not be surprised,” wrote the political scientist Ivan Krastev in March, “if, the day after the crisis, China looks like a winner and the United States looks like a loser.” The rise of China and the decline of the US has been the great geopolitical reality of the early 21st century. The two nations' response to Covid-19 has dramatically accelerated the shift in the balance of power and esteem.

China's lockdown appears to have worked. The death toll is astonishingly low: under 5,000 for a nation of 1.4bn compared to a toll, so far, of over 100,000 out of a population a quarter of the size. In other words, the virus has been almost one hundred times more deadly in the US.

The Chinese economy is now back open for business to a far greater extent than western economies, after initial measures that were much more draconian. For weeks, residents in the most affected parts of the country were not allowed out of their homes. In some cities, party officials were posted outside apartment blocks to ensure compliance. As the lockdown was lifted it was replaced with bio-surveillance; smartphones became informants—if you broke the rules, your phone would report you.

Coronavirus apparently beaten, China began its victory lap. Its success, Chinese diplomats claimed, showed that its model of governance worked. As western democracies anguished over which precious rights to withdraw, Beijing's international propaganda outfits were loudly trumpeting the advantages of authoritarianism. “The world is now entering a global test of governance in which China is now a leader,” proclaimed the *Global Times*, an English language newspaper controlled by the Chinese government. “Many western governments ill-equipped to handle coronavirus,” read another headline. ▶

Covid-19 has merely accelerated the great geopolitical reality of the 21st century: the rise of Xi's China and the decline of Trump's US

Beijing proudly presented itself as the saviour of other nations. Thanks to its global manufacturing might, the life-saving goods of this crisis—the masks, gowns, gloves and medicine—are all stamped “made in China.” But it hasn’t waited for other countries to buy them. Stepping into the leadership vacuum left by the US, the People’s Republic has sent planes carrying equipment and health officials across the world—more than 100 nations have taken delivery of masks, gowns, ventilators or other equipment. “Dear Chinese friends, sisters and brothers, welcome to Serbia!” exclaimed the Serbian President Alexander Vucic, when a shipment arrived in Belgrade. “Thank you very much to my brother, President Xi Jinping! Long live China!” Italy received masks and goggles, Spain millions of tests, even the UK received a shipment, boxes labelled with a thoughtfully tailored slogan “keep calm and fight coronavirus,” our own war-time heritage invoked to remind us who our new allies are in the battle against the virus.

Testing kits, face masks and goggles were sent to 10 Pacific island states, while officials from all 10 took part in teleconferences with Chinese counterparts advising them on how to deal with the pandemic. While most international organisations have floundered, the alternative networks Beijing has gradually nurtured over the last 15 years have swung into action—the 17+1 with central and eastern European nations; the Forum on China-Africa Co-operation; and the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation, which gives Beijing influence over central Asia.

The contrast with the US is stark. Since the election of Donald Trump, the slow eclipse of American leadership in the world has given way to a rapid downward spiral. His lies, breathtaking in their range, ferociousness and sheer volume; his brazen support for the far-right at home and abroad; his vicious attacks on anyone who dares to oppose him, however timidly—all this is counter to the whole spirit of liberal democracy, driving it apart from established allies and greatly sapping America’s fabled soft power.

In the first two months of the crisis, Trump tried to ignore Covid-19, dismissing it as “flu,” suggested it would disappear “like a miracle,” that the weather would sort it, or that he had simply heard “it’s going to be just fine.” Once he realised a deadly virus wouldn’t back down in the face of a volley of tweets, he changed tack and claimed it was a war and only he could defeat it. At his daily press briefings he acted like a petty tyrant, abusing reporters who have the temerity to ask him questions he doesn’t like (“you should say ‘thank you very much for good judgment,’” he told one from CBS News). As reliably mendacious as he is capricious, he has brazenly covered up his administration’s shortcomings: the lack of testing and PPE for medics and carers. He has undermined the lockdown by railing against it, refused to wear the masks his own administration recommended, and touted miracle cures—at one point suggesting it would be “interesting to check” whether injecting bleach could treat the virus; at another, broadcasting to the world that he had personally been taking an entirely unproven drug.

In past crises the world has turned to the US for help—or the US has imposed it without anyone asking. Not this time. Trump has vowed to defund the World Health Organisation (WHO), failed to join allies in the global quest for a vaccine, and has requisitioned US-made medical equipment that was bound for other nations.

The US, the nation with more resources than any other on earth, should have been the most prepared for a pandemic—indeed, it was the most prepared before Trump took office. But today, it has the world’s highest death toll.

If we view the United States of America as our beacon of hope, then democracy is indeed in trouble. And if we compare it only to China, then authoritarianism may well begin to look tempting. But look beyond the two superpowers and a different picture emerges: democracies have, overall, dealt with coronavirus far more effectively than dictatorships.

Instead of allowing China to luxuriate in its comparison with a malfunctioning US, judge it instead against its democratic neighbours: Taiwan, seven deaths in a population of 24m; South Korea, 272 deaths in a population of 51m; Japan, 894 deaths in a population of 126m. In this light, China’s record is average, at best.

Indeed, China’s autocratic nature helped to unleash the spread of the virus in the first place. The outbreak was covered up by local officials; whistleblowers, such as the 34-year-old doctor Li Wenliang who eventually lost his life to the virus, were gagged or ignored. The government lied to the WHO and only admitted Covid-19’s existence when they were confronted with the evidence. Critics of Beijing’s response have been “disappeared.” Had China had a free press and a transparent government, the outbreak might have been contained before it took hold. And for all the PR effort that has been put into its global role, it doesn’t withstand much scrutiny. Much of that kit donated to others has proved defective, and by encouraging rumours about America bringing the virus to Wuhan, Beijing has dabbled in the same sort of dishonest power play as Trump. In recent weeks, China has been using its English-language propaganda networks and social media not just to promote its own message, but also to spread disinformation and sow discord in the west.

“If we compare the United States only to China, then authoritarianism may well begin to look tempting”

Step back and review the diverse list of countries that have endured this crisis well, and it is in fact dominated by democracies. Aside from Taiwan, South Korea and Japan, there has been much to admire in the responses of New Zealand and Australia; of Germany, Denmark, Norway and Austria. It is not all about prosperity, either. After a dark decade economically, Greece has risen to the hour, and so too, in important ways, have Senegal, Ghana and the Indian state of Kerala. These democracies have different cultures and characteristics, but they all used the ballot box to pick competent leaders who listened to their experts. All enjoy a spirit of transparency and, perhaps most importantly when combatting a virus, a public that trusts its institutions.

When government is truly of the people then it has, in the words of the first and most celebrated student of American democracy, Alexis de Tocqueville, a “singular power,” with no need to corral others into sharing its beliefs, instead being able to rely on making “them permeate the thinking of everyone by a sort of enormous pressure of the mind of all upon the individual intelligence.” We are, in other words, inclined to believe what the government says to the extent we can identify with our government. (Boris Johnson and Dominic Cummings take note). And when such a government asks us to lend it emergency power over us, it



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Petty tyrant: Donald Trump's daily press briefings on coronavirus have been given over to abusing reporters and undermining lockdown orders

makes sense for us to acquiesce to the extent that we are confident that they will give that power back.

These are very deep advantages of the democratic over the authoritarian system. Coronavirus may have accelerated the rise of China and the decline of the US, but across the broader canvass, there is still powerful reason to hope that democracy can out.

Nonetheless, this is a moment of peril. Past global crises—such as the Depression of the 1930s, and the great inflation of the 1970s—have produced grave bouts

of democratic self-doubt. In a system founded on the right of the people to criticise and change the way they are governed, periodic collapses in confidence are not so much a bug as an occasionally-dangerous feature. The big question for liberal democracies over the coming months and years is whether they can keep faith in themselves, and remain true to their principles. Everything is still to play for—but nothing is secure.

2

Acceptable authoritarianism

One of the more unnerving aspects of the British lockdown has been the way in which we have all been conscripted into policing it. From social media complaints about joggers failing to respect the two-metre rule, to shaming pictures of individuals sitting down in the park, some of us have enthusiastically doxed in our neighbours. A YouGov poll in April for Crest, a crime and justice think tank, suggested that 51 per cent of Britons would be comfortable reporting on others.

Some police forces rushed to tap this attitude, setting up online forms encouraging us to report our neighbours for any alleged infringement we spot. Stood in my local park in northeast London this spring, as my son ran around chasing monsters, I glanced around to see if anyone was watching us. Should I do star jumps just in case?

The guidance issued by the government was vague and different police forces and councils interpreted it in different ways. In Derbyshire, the police have used drones to accuse people of breaking the rules by visiting a national park (they weren't); in Northamptonshire, the Chief Constable, Nick Adderley said that while his police force would not "start to marshal supermarkets and check the items in baskets and trolleys to see whether it's a legitimate, necessary item," if people didn't follow the rules, "we will start to do that." (He can't.)

A healthy democracy can, in the end, only be sustained in the vigilance of its people. But even before Covid-19 there had been signs of a dangerous complacency setting in. In the midst of the Brexit impasse last year, a Hansard Society poll revealed that 54 per cent of Britons believed that "Britain needs a strong ruler willing to break the rules." Coronavirus, and our response to it, has now confirmed how comfortable we are with "acceptable authoritarianism." The lockdown was wildly popular—more than 90 per cent approval in the early weeks, according to a YouGov poll. The Crest survey also showed majority support for deploying facial recognition technology to identify those breaching the rules, as well as for the use of drones to photograph people taking "unnecessary journeys." Almost 40 per cent favoured the police naming and shaming offenders on social media. ▶

While the changes feel sudden, everything that has been done to all of us in the past few weeks has been done to many of the vulnerable in society for far longer—and in some cases forever. (The idea that police officers might stretch the limit of their powers is no surprise to any person of colour, or anyone from Liverpool, or from Orgreave, or from Northern Ireland). But a good starting point for acceptable authoritarianism in 21st-century Britain would be the Labour government's abolition, in 2000, of cash payments for asylum seekers. They were replaced with vouchers for "essential" items, with supermarket cashiers roped in to decide which items in the basket passed that test—razors and socks, for instance, were often disallowed.

Not long after, the department for work and pensions began actively encouraging snooping, by urging people to inform on neighbours they suspected of working while claiming the dole—a stance since formalised into an anonymous "benefit cheats hotline." New Labour also used bosses and landlords to check in on migrants, an approach David Cameron's government then ramped up with the hostile environment policy, which effectively enlisted NHS staff, employers and anyone renting out a flat as border guards, forced by law to demand that (real or merely suspected) immigrants show them their papers.

One of the reasons why the UK government initially enjoyed such astonishing support, even from people who didn't vote for it, was because it took care to avoid overt party politics, and present itself as simply "following the science." In a way, this made for a refreshing break from the expert-bashing populism of the Brexit argument.

But the suggestion that ministers are merely vassals for presenting the decisions of experts is misleading, and corrosive to the whole spirit of democracy. For the reality is that there are always competing arguments, including about interpretation of the technical evidence, and more especially about the policies that follow from it. The *Sunday Times* has now revealed that some of the government's scientific advisers believed lockdown should have begun weeks earlier. That initial delay, which—as Rebecca Liu recounts on the right—was watched with bafflement in places like Wuhan that were deeper into the crisis, contributed to one of the highest death tolls in the world.

“The idea that government ministers are merely vassals for the decisions of experts is corrosive to the spirit of democracy”

Interestingly, what held Britain back, to such ruinous effect, was less doubt over the science than the government's doubt over its own standing—there were fears that an order to stay at home would not be adhered to. And in the months ahead, the inescapably political nature of policy will become clearer if “the science” is invoked to justify taking us down a controversial path. We are moving from a period where we *all* gave up our liberty for the greater good, to one where only certain segments of the population will be asked—perhaps told—to do so.

Home truths

Within weeks of worrying about her family in Wuhan, *Rebecca Liu* found them worrying about her—and coronavirus complacency in the UK

I first heard of it in a phone call with my father a few days into the new year. A mysterious illness was cropping up in the city, he said, infecting a few dozen people. Within a matter of weeks, the coronavirus's rampage across Wuhan made global news.

It is hard to describe what it feels like to see your hometown—and the hometown of your father and mother, and generations of fathers and mothers long before you—become an international punchline, a metonym for a crisis that has taken so many. It is even harder to describe the anxiety I felt that first month, checking in with my family to ensure they were safe (they were, and remain so). A particular worry was my mother, who works in a mental health ward of a hospital and lives nearby. Living in a high-risk zone, she is still stuck inside her apartment as I write in early June. My father had in fact moved away from Wuhan to the south of China some time before the outbreak, but was holidaying abroad with his family—the rest of whom still live in Wuhan—when it cropped up. My grandparents, uncle and nephew were barred from returning home, so had to move into my father's new apartment in the south. They stayed in that small space for two and a half months.

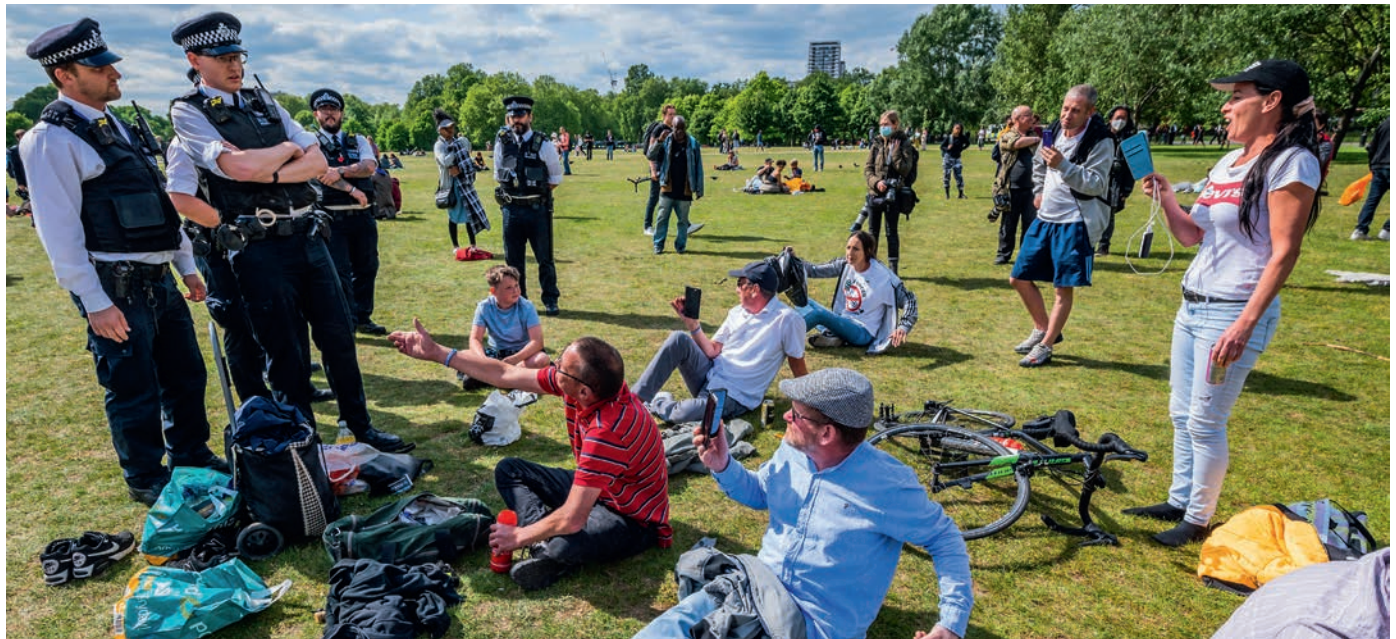
In February, the worry I had for my family started turning into anger at the lack of preparedness here. An English friend's brother returned from road tripping around China. There were no health checks at the border, nothing of quarantine. Racing festivals continued and Tube commutes rolled on. News reports valiantly tried to tally the number of coronavirus cases in London. Just one case. 104 cases. 407 cases. Anyone who takes these figures for anything other than wildly ill-informed underestimates is in for a nasty surprise, I thought.

For many Britons, the most difficult part of late March was adjusting to the restrictions on daily life and the overall climate of uncertainty. But I had been in that headspace for months; indeed, with numbers decreasing in Wuhan, I thought the worst of it—for my family—might be over. But it wasn't. Now, instead of worrying about my parents, they worried about me. I was terrified by “herd immunity,” but did my best to downplay it to them, lest they swim across multiple oceans to collect me themselves. Most difficult of all was trying to explain why, after weeks of their own highly-publicised suffering and confinement, Wuhan's crisis did not seem to spark competent and urgent action here. Does our pain not count for anything? my mother asked me over the phone. There was no good answer.

Has coronavirus dented my family's view of the west? Perhaps: my mother has certainly developed a grudge against Boris Johnson. But broader ideas about other countries slowly seep through more immediate concerns; and theirs, like so many of ours, are gloriously quotidian: they think about what television show they'll watch; that terrible conversation they had at work; whether they should finally cut their lockdown-nurtured locks. Understanding the news is important, of course, and so is tracking the evolution of global power. But we shouldn't forget that behind the proverbial corona curtain are also ordinary people going about their lives: grieving, doing their best, and dreaming of better days, too.

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Longer arm of the law: police disrupt a park gathering during lockdown

What if, for example, the science suggests that the best way to re-open the country is to “cocoon” the vulnerable, as David Halpern, the director of Whitehall’s Behavioural Insights Team has already suggested? Are “the vulnerable” all of the over-70s, and those with what we’ve come to refer to as “underlying conditions”? Or do the vulnerable include people of colour who appear to be disproportionately at risk? Would a government be “following the science” if it quarantined different races? In China, many of those who have been quarantined have been placed in government “hotels.” Would we do the same? And, at that point, is “hotel” really the most accurate word?

Since 9/11 there has been an ongoing battle between security and civil liberties. There are inherently tricky balances to strike and our record is mixed. We have accepted an astonishing rise in CCTV cameras, yet pushed back against other schemes such as ID cards. The Freedom of Information Act has increased transparency without endangering effective government, and the Human Rights Act (and the law of privacy that has developed under its auspices) has bolstered individuals’ protection without unduly compromising free speech. Such calibrated responses to the contours and complexities of real life are a vindication of open democratic processes: these reforms were dreamed up and argued for in civil society, vigorously debated in parliament, and are today openly applied in independent tribunals.

It is when liberal democracies lose their nerve, and attempt to operate in the dark, that things get out of kilter. As the Edward Snowden revelations demonstrated, the moment theoretically democratic governments believe themselves to be operating in secret, they can lapse into near-blanket surveillance.

All those battles about liberty and security are about to be refought. Are we willing to allow the government to track our movements, know who we meet, what we buy, know whether we’re ill? In return for the liberty to leave our homes, the answer is probably yes.

3

The lives of others

There is a phrase popularised by Martin Luther King and wheeled out by Barack Obama on big occasions: “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.” It’s a nice line, but it’s not true. Without wishing to take a metaphorical flourish too literally, the arc only bends towards justice if enough pressure is put upon it.

A resurgence of authoritarianism in liberal democracies won’t just have an impact inside those countries’ own borders—it could have profound consequences on the rest of the world too. The international right to asylum, which has already taken a battering over the past five years, could disappear. However well it has been doing with the virus, Greece has shamefully suspended the asylum application process for anyone arriving on their shores, never mind that this is illegal under both EU and international law.

We could easily move into a period where “public safety” trumps every other value, and freedom of expression, of speech, of religion can all be eroded without a murmur of international opprobrium. On the human rights front, there will surely be more Syrias, and we won’t even pretend to care. We risk looking on as democracy is dismantled in previously liberal societies. Because if the UK can suspend elections, anyone can. And if an EU leader like Orbán can rule by decree, what is to stop anyone else?

The absence of principled or effective cross-border alliances redoubles democracy’s frailty. Coronavirus may be a global crisis, but it has been met by national responses. The EU has been weak, the UN absent, the WHO attacked and too often ignored. If liberal ►

democracies are to survive while being worthy of the name, they will need to stand together for their threatened values. They will have to be clear about what is acceptable and what is not—and that means making some bold decisions.

It is time to let America go. It has rarely lived up to the idea that it is the “shining city upon a hill”—America’s belief in democracy has often only applied within its own borders, as anyone living in Indonesia, Chile or DR Congo, to name just a few, can attest. But the Trump presidency has taken this to a new level. When Trump announced the withdrawal of US funding for the WHO, the remaining parts of the liberal western alliance should have immediately promised to make up the shortfall. When US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo prevented the G7 from issuing a joint communiqué by insisting it refer to coronavirus as the “Wuhan virus,” it should have released a statement from the G6 and explained publicly why the US was wrong. For too long, western allies have appeased such bullying and, in doing so, failed to stand up for their supposed values. Trump is not your friend; an America led by him is not your ally.

“Nor is it too soon to speculate how long America can call itself a democracy”

Nor is it too soon to speculate as to how long America can call itself a democracy. Presidential elections are due to take place in November. Can more than 100m people go to the polls if Covid-19 is still rampant? Trump’s denouncement of the most practical fallback, postal voting, as “substantially fraudulent” was so hysterical as to earn a fact-check warning from Twitter; it looked very much like laying down a marker for undermining the electoral process later this year if he doesn’t like the way it’s heading. It is no longer impossible to imagine him attempting to suspend those elections—a potential first time in US history. Not the Second World War, not even the Civil War could stop Americans voting in November. Should it come to that, liberal democracies cannot stay silent.

By character and inclination, the current president of the US is a fascist. At the moment, Trump remains a fascist operating in a democratic system, but he has spent four years eroding its boundaries. As his despotic response to the riots provoked by the killing of a black man by a white police officer demonstrates, he will destroy any lawful or cultural restraint on his whims whenever he can get away with it.

Europe needs to stand firm too against aspiring autocrats in its own neighbourhood. If the Hungarian government doesn’t share your values, they shouldn’t be in your club. And yet far from suspending Hungary’s EU membership, when 14 nations, led by Germany and France, issued a statement condemning

Orbán’s new laws they failed to mention the country by name. If Budapest turns to China and Russia, so be it. Liberal democracy means something or it doesn’t. The diplomacy of democracy cannot be channelled through groupings like the G20, when it is currently led by the brutal autocracy of Saudi Arabia. If the world needs new multilateral organisations, build them. Create a league of democracies, with a set of standards that each member has to continually meet.

Just as coronavirus might usefully draw a line under the delusions of American exceptionalism, it should also finally banish its ageing British cousin. Our liberalism is not intrinsically less vulnerable than other countries because we supposedly haven’t been invaded in a thousand years. And our democracy is not more secure simply because we’ve never lived under a modern dictatorship.

Indeed, our history may leave us more complacent. In the face of the highest Covid-19 death rate on the planet, our prime minister has claimed that other countries have been looking at our “apparent success.” Instead of deluding ourselves about how we’re seen, we should have the humility to learn from those who really are succeeding. What can we learn from South Korea, a relatively young democracy that the west has tended to ignore? What can we learn from Iceland, a European neighbour that we rarely consider? And even if we are stubbornly bent on Anglo-Saxon inspiration, why not learn from New Zealand as opposed to the US?

There are those who would argue that “liberal democracy” was always an unlikely amalgam. Before the First World War, individual rights and mass people power were often seen as opposed. It was, say these pessimists, only the heat of that conflict that bound them together, and then the need to see off first the Nazis and then Soviet Communism which slowly hypnotised us into believing that they were a natural fit, as opposed to a marriage forged by specific and passing historical contingencies. For liberal democracy’s critics, Covid-19 may put an ageing accident out of its misery.

This is too gloomy: the right to vote and other civil rights have marched forward in lockstep, and societies that enjoy both have generally been—and remain—better run and better able to weather most storms. The combination of representative democracy, free and fair elections, democratic oversight of institutions, a free press and human rights for all is—still—the best form of governance humanity has devised.

Just as liberal democracy has evolved since the end of the Second World War, it can now rise again to new challenges. Our approach to dealing with the pandemic must be open, must be democratic. We have been asked to trust experts; governments should, in turn, also trust their citizens.

It will be messy, there will be mistakes. But there really is no other way. If liberal democracy is to be saved, it has to be liberal and it has to be democratic. **P**

Steve Bloomfield is Prospect’s deputy editor

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Move fast and break things

The continent's new generation of leaders are egotistical, brash and even Eurosceptic—and yet they might be just what the European Union needs

MARK LEONARD

Outside the historic chancellery building in Vienna's Ballhausplatz 2 in early March, horses and carts ferried tourists languidly about the historic imperial centre while people sat outside the famous coffee houses enjoying the first rays of spring sunshine. They had no idea that Austria's 33-year old chancellor, Sebastian Kurz, was about to lock the city down and force them into house arrest for the next few weeks.

The young chancellor had been studying the spread of coronavirus in neighbouring Italy with growing nervousness. After consultations with counterparts in far-flung places—Israel, Japan, Singapore and South Korea—on 11th March he became one of the first European leaders to introduce unilateral border closures. Although it was obvious that this precipitate action would have consequences far beyond his borders, Kurz's instinct was not to call an international summit or co-ordinate with the rest of Europe, still less the United States.

This nationally-focused, fast-moving, action-hero-style leadership is the antithesis of established ideas about European unity and governance through consensus. It is also, however, emblematic of the way a rising generation of politicians are ruling across a continent in the grip of the Covid-19 crisis.

A couple of days after Kurz's March press conference, Denmark's youngest-ever prime minister, Mette Frederiksen, announced her own border closures not in an address in parliament, but in a Facebook post. In Germany, the youngest minister in Angela Merkel's cabinet, 40-year-old health minister Jens Spahn, became the chief crisis manager. One of his first acts was to introduce an export ban on medical protective equipment, restricting its availability to other EU countries against the rules of the single market. The same happened in France where President Macron decided to confiscate all stocks of protective masks—including a consignment imported by a Swedish company destined for delivery to Italy and Spain.

In those two southern European powers so heavily hit by the virus, the politicians responsible for fighting the virus are also disruptors: former law professor and political outsider Giuseppe Conte and underdog-turned-prime minister Pedro Sánchez. Although they looked for European solidarity in this hour of need, they share the impatient instincts of their unruly peers.

Every crisis gives rise to a new cast of leaders with their own style, formative experiences and blind spots. This group marks a real generational shift, and could not be more different from the Third Way brigade of baby boomer Atlanticist neoliberals who led Europe through the financial—and euro—crisis a decade ago. The leaders of that last crisis were born in the 1950s and came to power through the traditional route of loyalty to established parties. They tended to regard globalisation as irreversible, and to see the EU as one part of the solution to managing it, and American leadership as another. As the world shook, they reflexively reached out to the US in the hope of building a new international architecture.

The new leaders do not pretend to be master builders. Instead, they are disruptors with a “move fast and break things”

ethos inspired, in part, by Silicon Valley. For better or worse, these are not politicians with any inclination to try to take their continent back to the old status quo. They are more likely to look to Mark Zuckerberg, Steve Jobs or Beppe Grillo (the comedian who turned Italian politics on its head by founding the Five Star Movement) for lessons than they are to look towards Helmut Kohl or FDR. This will have consequences not just for how they deal with coronavirus, but how they attempt to reorder the world once the crisis has passed. Despite their disdain for European protocols could it just be that, in the end, the continent will have reason to be grateful to them?

Nationally-focused:

Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz (left) was the first European leader to close borders—and he didn't wait to consult EU partners

Egos with momentum

To understand the restless new governing style in Europe—and the suspicion these leaders have of working through traditional institutions—start by looking at how this new cohort won power in the first place. They are all risk-takers, united by a mission to break the political mould through a strategy of insurgency. All of them have sought to redraw the electoral map in their countries, either by creating a new party or reinventing a pre-existing one. While Macron and Conte came to power via the formation of entirely new movements, Kurz, Frederiksen and Sánchez shook up the old parties they had risen through, and built a new electoral base by forging novel coalitions across traditional camps—while cultivating personal popularity. All defied the odds and achieved something that seemed impossible. They developed a politics centred on mobilising new movements as opposed to relying on traditional parties to capture opinion. By forging online connections, they fostered intimate links with voters who had felt abandoned by the old mainstream.

Macron named his movement *La République En Marche*—often shortened to *En Marche*, which shares his initials—and spent months researching which issues were being neglected by the established centre-left and centre-right. The idea of being *en marche*, literally marching, captures a shared idea of momentum as the essence of leadership. Macron managed to cut the old established parties out of the conversation, and turn the election into a contest between himself and the National Front, a reframing of the French electoral system then formalised when the Socialists and Les Republicans were knocked out in the first round.

Kurz, nicknamed the “Macron of the East,” renamed the party list of the Austrian People's Party as *Liste Sebastian Kurz: Die neue Volkspartei* (List Sebastian Kurz—the New People's Party). He offered to break the cartel politics that had seen grand coalitions of the centre-left and centre-right govern his country for over a decade. By taking a hard line on immigration, he was able to forge a new coalition with the far-right Freedom Party, but then weakened that force to the point of virtual destruction by stealing its rallying cry.

Spahn—who presumably longs to be known as the “Kurz of the west”—has been trying to persuade Merkel's CDU to follow the same path as the Aus-

trian chancellor on immigration and integration. As the first openly gay politician to serve in the German cabinet, he has used his membership of a minority to take a tougher stance on diversity issues, unashamedly declaring himself “burka-phobic.”

Frederiksen, the energetic leader of the Danish Social Democrats, adopted a similar recipe for renewal on the centre-left: stealing a march on the migration issue from the far-right Danish People's Party. She made a tactical decision to sacrifice support among cosmopolitan city-dwellers in order to reclaim working-class voters from the towns and the countryside—a more coherent version of the “blue Labour” strategy that some in the UK believe might have saved Bassetlaw and Blyth Valley for the party last year. And in Denmark, at least, it worked: decimating the electoral base of the far-right party and taking the social democrats back into government.

“They are more likely to look to Mark Zuckerberg or Steve Jobs for political lessons than Helmut Kohl or FDR”

Pedro Sánchez, who is also known as “Pedro the handsome” had a more convoluted path to power. He managed to regain leadership of Spain's socialist party in May 2017 and became PM 13 months later, less than two years after he had previously been toppled from the helm of the opposition. His big play was to displace the populist party, Podemos, on his left flank.

But most iconic of all is Italy's Five Star Movement, a totally novel, anarchic upstart form of politics born on the internet. Although he did not set up the party himself, Conte was a complete political outsider who used it to become prime minister—and is now Italy's most popular politician.

Rebel rebel

Today's leaders are the children of globalisation—most have spent time living and studying in other countries—but they are rebellious children. They prefer flexible and rapid action to the slow grind of multilateral negotiations. Where Gordon Brown and Barack Obama organised a G20 meeting to chart a way out of the Lehman crisis, the first instinct of the Corona Generation was to seal their borders and renationalise supply chains. The politically-seismic migration crisis of 2015 was central to the rise of the new cohort, and—watching the EU and global governance spectacularly fail in the face of the emergency—it sharpened their focus on the national over the supra-national, and on action over diplomatic conversation.

They see the purpose of leadership as being to surf the wave of history rather than being able to control ▶

Europe's disruptors

The impatient faces of a continent's new generation of leaders

						
						
	Sebastian Kurz	Mette Frederiksen	Pedro Sánchez	Emmanuel Macron	Jens Spahn	Giuseppe Conte
Country	Austria	Denmark	Spain	France	Germany	Italy
Position	Chancellor	Prime Minister	Prime Minister	President	Health minister	Prime Minister
Year of birth	1986	1977	1972	1977	1980	1964
Education	Studied law, but no degree	Social science; African studies	PhD in business and economics	Philosophy; Public affairs	Political science	Professor of private law
Hobbies	Trekking and biking	Pop and rock; being outside in nature	Basketball	Piano	Fitness, biking, opera, theatre	Basketball and languages
Twitter followers	400K	300K	1.3M	5.2M	150K	650K

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it, and certainly not presuming you can rely on cross-border alliances and institutions to divert global tides. Even when they speak a language of idealism, they temper it with pragmatism. Spahn's favourite quote—which has a prominent place on his Facebook page—could be the motto for the whole generation: “What you can't stop, you should welcome right away.”

The same applies to the currents of domestic politics. Instead of letting populists make hay out of anti-migration feelings, these rulers tend to channel the same resentment in service of their own interests. Kurz and Frederiksen saw early on that they could outflank the populist parties and make them irrelevant. Meanwhile Macron and Sánchez posed as the only alternative to populism, in the process provincialising other broadly centrist forces such as the established socialists and republicans in France and also the newer, centre-right Ciudadanos in Spain. Although Macron and Sánchez started out being welcoming towards migrants, they have seamlessly corrected their course in line with changing public opinion.

The continent's new leaders demonstrate the same pragmatism when it comes to the role of the state. Even those on the right are much less neoliberal and more interventionist than the Lehman generation. In the global financial crisis, there was rhetoric about the Great Depression and FDR's New Deal, but even those social democrats who demanded a stimulus in 2008 were cautious about its scale; still feeling constrained by the lessons of Thatcherism, they erred on the side of conservatism in fiscal and industrial policies. The new generation are much more interventionist—and not just in economic terms. While Bill Clinton declared “the era of big government is over,” the new leaders embrace a muscular role for the state even if they have a pretty flexible understanding of exactly what this involves.

When the economic consequences of the coronavirus crisis became obvious this generation of leaders moved quickly in favour of massive state interventions. Macron is a former investment banker who was attacked from the left as a closet neoliberal

when he led a controversial charge to reduce the French deficit. But when the storm hit, he quickly adopted the most expansive employment scheme in the world: the state that he runs is currently paying the salaries of almost three quarters of French employees. Macron also decided to regulate the price of disinfectants and confiscate stocks and the production of medical protection equipment.

In Italy, in spite of the libertarian roots of his party, Conte has dived deep into the minutiae of economic management. His government even fixed the price for masks at €0.50. But it is this cohort's willingness to countenance lockdowns, to close borders and introduce surveillance systems that perhaps best reveals their postmodern and muscular pragmatism.

These leaders' attitudes to international relations are also strikingly different from the Lehman generation's. They definitely do not share its instinctive Atlanticism. The US is hardly mentioned in interviews, statements, or profiles of these politicians. Perhaps this is the product of the fallout of the Iraq War, which most of them experienced as very young adults. They emerged into a world in which America no longer played the purportedly “positive” interventionist role of the past.

This generation of leaders is not afraid to speak up against Trump. Macron trolled the Twitter President by responding to his decision to withdraw from the Paris climate deal with a promise to “make our planet great again.” Frederiksen boosted her domestic popularity and her global fame by responding aggressively to posturing Trumpian talk about buying Greenland.

The American global order is over for this generation, as can be seen from their interest in looking for new partners. During his first state visit to the US in February 2019, Kurz noted that he already had four meetings with Russian president Vladimir Putin in 2018. Italy's young foreign minister Luigi di Maio is also called the “Chinese” minister as he works on building a closer relationship between Rome and Beijing. Conte himself wants to revisit the sanctions the EU imposed against Russia

in connection with Ukraine, and Macron too inclines towards a European rapprochement with Moscow.

Both European and not

The most paradoxical aspect of these new disruptors is their attitude to Europe. They are both more quintessentially European than any past generation of leaders, and yet at the same time, more dismissive of the current EU. They are part of the Erasmus/easyJet generation and yet their political awakening was defined not by the institution-building of Kohl and Mitterrand, but rather by the rise of Euroscepticism and the fragmentation of the euro, the refugee crisis and—not to be forgotten—Brexit. They all saw Britain's departure as a sign of how the EU could crumble if the institutions in Brussels failed to adapt to the impatience of voters. They have been divided over the EU's €750bn "recovery fund," with Macron, Sanchez and Conte leading the charge for grants while Kurz and Frederiksen have made common cause with the Dutch and the Swedes to insist that support should come in the form of repayable loans.

"Spahn's favourite quote could be a motto for the whole generation: 'What you can't stop, you should welcome at once'"

And yet, even their criticisms of the EU flow from a genuine desire to rekindle continental co-operation, and to reform and renew the body that is still tasked with that. As Kurz put it in an interview at the beginning of his chancellorship: "Macron has the will to change Europe for the better, which, as a citizen of Europe and an Austrian politician, I am very glad about. I will do everything I can to support him and indeed others who are resolved to change and strengthen the EU." Sánchez goes further: "I declare myself a militant pro-European." Even Conte, often seen as the head of a Eurosceptic government, declared: "Some people say we wanted to challenge the EU, I say we actually want to give it a shake to revive it."

Hope without faith

Just as he was first with border controls, as the crisis eased Kurz was the first EU leader to announce a lockdown exit strategy, again closely followed by Frederiksen. Coffee houses in Vienna are re-opening and there is a promise to return to some kind of normality. But what kind of new normal will the corona leaders build? Will they be interested in fundamentally changing our daily habits and ideas about the world? And what will that mean for the future of Europe?

The short-term consequences of Covid-19 have shaken the European project more fundamentally than the refugee or euro crises—the renationalisation of pol-

icy, the closing of borders, disruptions to the single market and supply chains. The very idea of self-isolation is a defeat for the European ideal: interdependence itself is on trial, seen as frailty or a threat, rather than an aspiration.

Faultlines are emerging between those focused on saving lives, and those prioritising saving jobs; between decision-makers who want to localise production of strategic assets, and defenders of free cross-border commerce. The first reactions in March seemed dire for European integration: leaders sought shelter in exclusively national solutions, while continental co-ordination and even co-operation was absent.

But looking ahead, there is reason to hope. The roots of today's Euroscepticism lie in the visionary leadership of earlier generations who ripped down borders, scrapped national currencies and bound Europeans not just into a single market for goods but also, and more controversially, for labour too. They hoped that building interdependence would bind the continent into a community of fate, and that economic integration would be followed by political unity.

For that generation, interdependence would act as a balm to heal historical grievances between the nations. Their vision may have helped the continent escape from its bloody history, but the interdependence slowly became a grievance factory, as opposed to a grievance cure. The euro created tensions between debtors and creditors. Free movement put downward pressure on wages and welfare states in the host countries, and created brain-drains and hollowed-out communities in the countries that the migrants had left behind. The absence of borders in the Schengen area fuelled nativist fears about refugees crossing the continent. While a majority of people glory in the opportunities of an open Europe, substantial minorities feel it has deprived them of control and left them vulnerable.

In the same way that Richard Nixon was better placed than a peace-loving internationalist to reach out to Communist China, this generation of leaders could turn out to be the ones to re-energise a wilting European project. Precisely because of their hard-nosed and pragmatic way of doing politics and lack of any European religion, they have the credibility to make a new case for co-operation. Their mission will never be about tearing down the barriers between states, markets and peoples. Rather, it is to prove to Europe's citizens that interdependence can be made safe again.

The true believers who sought European integration ultimately only bequeathed a populist backlash. If this new generation of leaders, who start out unencumbered by any special faith or loyalty to the EU, nonetheless come to believe it is the best way to further the interests of themselves and their country, then they might be able to persuade their voters of the same. And if so, just maybe, the new disruptors can leave the European Union stronger than they found it. **12**

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The Duel

Could Covid-19 kill off the EU?



Bruno Maçães
YES



Anu Bradford
NO

YES Indeed it could, but not in the way you think. Nations will not turn their backs on the European Union in search of lost national spirit. Quite the contrary. They will turn to the institutions in Brussels with increasingly taxing demands, and that is something the system was not built for. The EU was not designed to take hard decisions between competing interests. It is very bad at making choices. What it does well is to govern by rule, and the more impersonal and automatic the rules, the better.

But suppose that the present difficulties are only the beginning. Deep interconnection between different systems leads one crisis to cascade into the next. Start with debt in the south. Italian debt is expected to surge above 160 per cent of GDP, with France and Spain also at risk. These countries are bound to demand the creation of new EU-wide financing mechanisms; they will be refused because that would fundamentally change the union. At the same time, countries such as Germany will ask for new rules on monetary policy to lock in new safeguards—the recent ruling of its constitutional court against the European Central Bank showed this is an increasingly fraught issue. But again, these requests will be refused because they would undermine the European project.

Many countries will demand clear guidelines on how to deal with China and the US, as the two giants enter a new cold war. Brussels, though it is supposed to have sole competence over trade, will not have an answer.

At some point an impotent EU could pronounce itself incapable of solving problems without a mandate larger than the one it currently enjoys. National leaders would return

home, frustrated and angry about an outcome no one really wants, and fearful that a new push for centralisation could turn their electorates against Europe altogether.

There are few outright Leavers on the continent. But with politics stuck, leaders would proceed to address their problems alone or in small coalitions. Those of us who have argued for years that federalism is not an emotional goal but an insurance policy against dangerous paralysis might feel vindicated. But for the EU as we know it, it could be game over.

“Deep interconnection between systems could lead one disaster to cascade into the next”

NO Of course, national interests differ in this crisis, as in many crises before. But for me, the EU was built precisely to reconcile competing demands. That is what it does. The key moments of integration have all been controversial: building the single market, adopting a common currency, enlarging the union. Even the technocratic rule-making rests on delicate compromises.

I share your concern about the cumulative effect of current challenges. The pandemic is triggering a financial crisis, and the debts of countries such as Italy risk becoming unsustainable. But the eurozone is better prepared to tackle this crisis today, thanks to measures taken after the previous financial crisis. While those have not resolved the fundamental flaw in

the design of the currency union—common monetary policy without joint fiscal policy was always unsustainable—if the solution is to either unwind monetary co-operation or strengthen fiscal co-operation, my bets are on the latter. That was the outcome of the last financial crisis as well, which saw the EU’s powers grow, not diminish.

Other problems are manageable in comparison. The EU can and will defend the integrity of the single market when faced with Franco-German demands to convert competition policy into a tool for industrial policy. Berlin and Paris do not always get their way, as evidenced last year when the commission refused to approve the proposed rail merger between Siemens and Alstom.

China-US tensions do pose a challenge, but opportunities for engagement remain. The EU can work with the US to counter China’s disinformation tactics and its stealthy export of digital surveillance. Similarly, it can engage with China on climate change or defending the international trade system, as it did recently by agreeing on a temporary World Trade Organisation dispute resolution mechanism when US actions rendered the existing mechanism dysfunctional.

You trace the EU’s incapacity to solve problems to its limited political mandate. But the EU is known for using crises to expand its mandate. Following this one, it may well gain more powers in public health, as few believe that member states alone are capable of protecting their citizens from global pandemics.

YES When I look back to past crises affecting the EU, I do not see the

ability to make hard choices and pick the best way forward. What I see is the technocratic drive to make the choice disappear. Greece didn't leave the euro, but neither was it allowed genuine debt relief. The technical ingenuity was impressive, but will it work this time, when debt levels will be higher and when markets might not spare even France?

Italy and Spain will ask for debt mutualisation, but in return Germany would demand complete control over their budgetary decisions. Berlin is already demanding that competition policy be diluted because it fears Chinese economic power. But if European giants end up devouring smaller companies, how can other countries go along with that? It is no coincidence that the German constitutional court recently questioned the primacy of EU law: I see it as a direct consequence of deep German anxieties about a world suddenly looking much more dangerous. What do you make of the commission's response, threatening Germany with the possibility of infringement proceedings?

My fear is that "rule by rules" was good enough for normal times. But the virus creates an emergency in which you need to be able to decide disputes between opposing sides. I fear the EU is already tempted to answer the most difficult questions by saying they are "beyond competence." Issues too difficult for Brussels to deal with are sent back to member states. How else do you explain the fact that quarantines and travel restrictions are being decided by national capitals, with the EU stepping aside? Has the EU reached system overload already?

NO I certainly agree that overload is the order of the day. Governments everywhere are facing an overload due to the challenges triggered by Covid-19. But the European response cannot be to offload those challenges to governments that are too small to deal with them. Nation states alone cannot fight a global pandemic—and they know it. Your native Portugal and my native Finland may disagree on debt mutualisation, but neither can respond to global financial crises alone. The same goes for other hard problems, such as mitigating climate change or managing migration.

It is rarely wise to escalate intractable problems into all-out conflicts (a good strategy for marital and political unions alike). Take the German court challenge to ECB bond-buying. The EU institutions will likely respond, as they should, by de-escalating the conflict while defending the fundamentals: the independence of the ECB and primacy of EU treaties and the European court. If the conflict escalates, Germany might ultimately be more willing to amend its basic law than bring down the eurozone.

Globalisation will take a hit in the coming years. But deglobalisation is not the answer.

Instead, we will likely see a move towards regionalisation. No European country can declare economic sovereignty and start sourcing, producing and selling locally. As trust in global supply chains evaporates, the EU's large internal market provides a critical hedge, combining scale, diversity and reliability. It remains the fundamental unit around which economic destinies and political choices in Europe can be built. Plus, the member-state capitals need Brussels. The EU has always been a popular scapegoat for their unpopular but necessary policy decisions—and there will be many of those ahead.

“The EU has used crises to expand its mandate throughout history—and may soon gain public health powers”

YES I agree that member states are too small to deal with the problems they are facing now, but that does not guarantee that the EU can deal with them. That way of answering the question suggests that only pooled power will be enough to confront the overload challenge. Unfortunately, I see no sign that member states can take that leap. No leap leaves us with a weakened EU, and a growing gap between the gravity of the problems and the capacity the EU has at its disposal. The EU is weaker because the problems have become bigger.

The signs are very negative so far. Free movement in relatively normal times was effectively defended by the EU institutions, even during the refugee crisis. In the pandemic, on the other hand, those institutions have run away from the issue. Travel restrictions were imposed at the national level. There was no co-ordination, nor any attempt to exercise powers that were actually the EU's in many cases. The institutions hid from view not out of inertia or incompetence, but because they knew their own weakness and were afraid of being exposed. And now, it is again the states that are lifting some restrictions—in a purely self-interested bid to salvage tourism revenue!

The proposed new EU recovery instrument, while good news, will leave the fundamentals untouched. It could have been different, but that would have required a clearer mandate. I do not think the EU institutions are undemocratic. They are democratic, but their mandate is insufficient when the situation becomes a matter of running risks, especially on life and death issues, or going against strongly felt national interests.

If normality is quickly restored, damage might be limited; prestige would suffer, but time might heal the wounds. If a deep crisis

continues for three or four years, and Brussels continues to hide from difficult decisions, the sense that the EU has real power and legitimacy might dissolve, not only in the eyes of elites but of most citizens. At that point, only a political ghost would remain.

NO In imposing travel restrictions, member states were acting on their public health mandate, which collided with the EU's free movement mandate. But when the pandemic is over, this collision is likely to be resolved in favour of the EU. Free movement will be restored and the EU will have gained more powers in public health. EU policies often originate from national capitals, not Brussels. The commission's role is to harness and implement EU-wide consensus. The Macron-Merkel recovery fund proposal is no different in this regard, providing a foundation for the commission's €750bn proposal.

I also worry less about the EU's weak mandate and more about the failure to deploy its strongest mandate to the fullest. The EU needs to complete the single market. This may finally happen as member states have few options but to anchor their post-crisis recovery on reanimating it. Intra-EU trade is already vital, and considerably more important than member states' trade with third countries. As the pandemic and trade wars continue to destabilise the global economy, large European companies will refocus on opportunities at home. This may provide the impetus to deepen the single market in services and the digital economy, and even usher in energy and capital markets union. These require common regulation, allowing the EU to play to its strengths.

The single market does not only deliver economic benefits but important protections: a cleaner environment, safer food and enhanced protection of data, to name a few. These boost the EU's relevance and legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens.

Brexit shows that states may choose to walk away from these benefits. But the UK's example has made that choice distinctly unappealing. "Sovereign Britain" looks less sovereign when UK companies continue to follow EU rules to retain access to the single market even after their country has lost all say over them. If anything, Brexit vividly illustrates the value of European integration by reminding people of the lonely alternative.

That integration, with all its shortcomings, has helped make Europeans safe, rich and free. While coronavirus will diminish those attributes for some years to come, restoring them calls for—and should bring into being—a stronger, not weaker, EU. **■**

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The warning

Ebola taught us everything
we needed to know about dealing
with an epidemic.
So why didn't we listen?

KATHERINA THOMAS

The Ebola cemetery is one of the quietest places in Liberia. It is known as Disco Hill. That may sound like some sort of cruel joke, but it was named long before, for the gunfire battles that took place there during the Liberian civil war, in which two rebel factions stormed back and forth as if they were dancing.

Disco Hill is silent today. Since the end of the 2013-16 West Africa Ebola outbreak, even the birdsong there has seemed oddly subdued. Occasionally a ringtone or a radio cuts through the quiet, only to be hushed by the wind. Walk among the orange mounds with their thin wooden crosses, rubber trees arching their backs up over the hill, and you're met with a scattering of flowers—the expression of both love and loss.

And, although more than 3,000 of Liberia's Ebola dead are buried here, grief is far from the only lingering emotion. Four years after the end of the outbreak, anger still burns. Ebola is spread through fluids, and so the bodies are still sealed in the sterile shrouds in which they had to be wrapped before they could be embraced by the ground. A memorial hut holds 16 oil drums, each one packed with ashes and bone. In West Africa, a decent death demands soil, but the drums hold the remains of souls who died unidentified, their final resting place not earth but tin. In the heat of the outbreak, data was lost on how many unidentified cremations took place, but the ash weighs a total of about 7,000lb. It bears heavy upon the land—like the weight of an elephant, or two London taxicabs.

"Ebola has gone from my body but it is still in me," a Liberian Ebola survivor, 35-year old Finda Fallah, told me, two years after the end of the outbreak. She lost her seven-year-old son to Ebola, and his remains were among those that went unburied. Without a monument to her loss, she feels it more acutely, she said. "I know it will stay there long life," she added, "because my heart got spoiled."



Between 2013 and 2016, Ebola killed at least 11,315 people in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. It devastated communities, seared through families, and sparked economic and mental health crises which have been extremely hard to recover from. It also taught us a great deal about what can go both right and wrong in epidemic management—lessons that could have been heeded by resource-rich countries such as the UK.

The rest of the world heard many stories like Fallow's, sympathised—but only looked on. British newspapers ran some sensationalist, fearful headlines, but we also saw the kind of “sensible” journalism that reassured us that nothing on the same scale was likely to happen here, reassurances that sounded plausible. After all, the epidemics in the UK's recent history—swine flu, measles, typhoid and indeed HIV/Aids—did not have as high a toll in the west as they did in parts of Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

An October 2015 public briefing document by Public Health England (which has since been withdrawn) said this: “England has a world-class healthcare system with robust infection-control systems and processes, and disease-control systems that have a proven record of dealing with imported infectious diseases. Ebola causes most harm in countries with less developed healthcare facilities and public health capacity.”

That was then. Now, less than five years later we are coming to terms with a number of deaths from Covid-19 that has, in many countries with “world-class healthcare systems,” far exceeded the West African toll from Ebola. How did we overestimate our capacity to respond to a new infectious disease outbreak? Did we fail to learn the lessons of the last one—and, if so, why?

The quietest place in Liberia: a gravedigger works on Disco Hill in 2015, the home of some 3,000 graves from the country's Ebola outbreak

In the great Ebola outbreak, there were, as now, drastic PPE shortages. There were stories of health workers fashioning gowns and gloves from plastic bags—518 of them ultimately lost their lives while caring for the sick. As cases surged, clinics and hospitals were overwhelmed. There was no known cure nor even treatment, and a race was on to develop a vaccine.

The postmortem was damning: Ebola was the symptom, the system the disease—and the world had failed to treat it in time. But in its wake, there was a plea to stop anything like this happening again by identifying and tackling the root causes. Governments and international partner organisations published glossy “lessons learned” reports. They documented the underlying problems that sound extremely familiar in the Covid-19 context: ill-prepared health systems fixated on cure at the expense of prevention, broken supply chains, poor co-ordination and a lack of public trust in leadership.

Mixed messaging was up there too, as well as misinformation and conspiracy theories. “At the beginning of the outbreak, each organisation thought that they had all the answers, and many of them sent out public messages without harmonising with the government,” says Joseph Howard, Director of the Center for Justice and Peace Studies, a Liberian civil society group.

This encapsulates the way things went wrong. Effective public health should function as an ecosys-

tem, with important interdependencies and feedback loops between everything from politics and education to business and the media. When the nebulous quality of trust pervades relations between them, they operate in relative harmony, and can settle into an equilibrium that can turn the tide on epidemics. Instead of such a healthy ecology, however, what we initially saw with Ebola in West Africa were sectors operating in silos.

During the first months in Liberia, those responsible for different “pillars” of the response effort—contact tracing, safe burials, community engagement—mostly met separately. The gulf in their co-ordination explains why, as Ebola swept through Liberia, some international NGOs erected billboards with messages like “Ebola is deadly” and “Ebola kills!” They intended to scare people into seeking treatment, but they hadn't taken an emotional temperature check on how communities were feeling, and so the messages had the opposite effect. Why, people reasoned, should they go to treatment centres, if they would die anyway?

“There were drastic PPE shortages and overwhelmed hospitals. There was no known cure and a race to find a vaccine”

Within two years there was a successful vaccine, but that alone didn't end the outbreak. The tide was turned only through a combination of improved medical care, cross-sector co-ordination and a real community drive, in which citizens showed up for one another despite sometimes weak central co-ordination. In Liberia, for instance, more than 2,000 contact tracers went door-to-door, risking their lives for infrequent pay, while a network of 15,000 others reached almost every community in the country, braving rivers and waterlogged roads to ensure people had information about how to protect themselves. “At the local level, there are silent heroes in schools, in government, in healthcare, in business, in the villages and in cities who saved lives,” said the Sierra Leonean campaigner Fatou Wurie.

When the outbreak was declared over, pledges were made: to invest in early warning systems and health infrastructure; to deepen that life-saving community engagement; to share data; and to lift organisational siloes in favour of multidisciplinary taskforces.

Some of these promises have been honoured, especially on sub-Saharan African soil. They have informed the response to subsequent crises like the ongoing Ebola outbreak in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and have been channelled into rapid and compassionate management of the current Covid-19 response in countries including Rwanda, Nigeria, South Africa and Senegal. ▶

Surveying the Covid-19 picture across Africa in the *Financial Times* at the end of April, the journalist David Pilling marvelled at the cross-border role of the new Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, which had organised video conferences with heads of state to co-ordinate strategy, and had begun pulling together “a continent-wide effort to test, trace and treat involving a million-strong army of health workers.” He noted, too, how states like South Africa, Nigeria and Rwanda had not answered the science with slow bureaucratic grind, but instead acted early: respectively locking down fast, closing their airports and issuing clear guidance to citizens.

And despite inadequate health budgets in many of these places, and political missteps around handling the crisis in individual countries (such as Tanzania, where president John Magufuli has urged his compatriots to come together in churches and pray), across the continent there are some signs that the energy is paying off. As of late May, recorded figures on deaths were still in double or single figures in most countries, and below 500 in every state south of the Sahara.

This isn't to say there aren't challenges. As case counts rise, there are plenty. But the contrast with the losses in many wealthier countries, including our own, demands serious interrogation. A medical analogy might help elucidate why leaders and organisations elsewhere in the world have not proved as willing to hold up a mirror to their own actions in the same way as in Africa. Consider immunological memory—the ability of the human body to respond more effectively to pathogens that it has previously encountered. The process is guided by what scientists call Memory T cells; like archival librarians, they keep records of past defeats. The human immune system is an experiential learner—and so, it turns out, are human societies.

Psychological studies have shown how experiencing frightening or threatening events triggers a mechanism in the brain that supports survival. For instance, after getting burned by hot water, a child is likely to avoid the kettle in order to prevent a repeat ordeal. In the worst-affected countries of West Africa almost everyone knew someone who died from Ebola, and further south in the continent the toll of HIV/Aids has likewise been devastating. Grief and residual trauma seared into the collective memory, remaining there long after the rhythm of daily life returned. As a region, West Africa simply could not afford to forget Ebola. But other countries, in other parts of the world, proceeded on the basis that they could.

Ebola never truly made it into the long-term memory bank of the Global North. It was seen as too distant, too remote and, given the treatment by some media outlets, to the extent that it registered, it was cast by some as yet another African tragedy; something that “could never happen here.”

Consequently, practical—and life-saving—lessons that could have been learned by the rest of the world were not. One of the most important is to ensure the population as a whole takes ownership of the problem: that public health really is of the public, by the public and for the public.

Writing in the *BMJ*, a team mostly from the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine outlined how this was eventually done in parts of Africa. In Sierra Leone, for example, thousands of locally hired and trained individuals were employed or else volunteered to work within their own areas through community leaders, families and youth networks to develop the minutiae of tailored responses (such as the precise placement of handwash-

ing stations and isolation spaces), to oversee bylaws and restrictions, and to keep tabs on rumours about the disease.

In Nigeria, the successful containment of Ebola was built on lessons learned from its own earlier experience with polio contact tracing. In both West Africa and the DRC, the Ebola response leadership ultimately developed a holistic recognition of the sprawling requirements of tackling the disease—from psychosocial and survivor care to the logistics of surveillance and isolation support, including food delivery. They also co-ordinated consistent messaging across all channels. In the recent Ebola outbreak in the DRC, the actual delivery of services remained firmly decentralised. Tracing, for example, was not delegated to a wizardly app, but run by local people, whose surveillance was reliable precisely because of their links and the trust they enjoyed.

All of this shows how important community “agency,” that is to say people taking ownership of the problem, is to containing an epidemic. As Ngozi Erondutu at the Centre for Universal Health, Chatham House explains, “all of that experience is not just thrown out the window when there's a new outbreak.” Erondutu added: “Populations themselves, if they've gone through this before, are also ready to take on the mantle to respond.”

“The human immune system is an experiential learner—and so, it turns out, are human societies”

Today, in the Covid context, some of these principles are—some of the time, in some places—being respected further afield. In these pages last month, Stephen Buranyi highlighted Germany's testing masterclass and found that decentralisation and local initiative were a huge part of the success. Massachusetts in the US has, the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine team noted, “eschewed mobile contact tracing apps, electing to hire 1,000 local contact tracers instead.”

And in the UK, a large NHS Volunteer Responder network has been summoned, even if it has so far been entrusted with limited responsibilities. But elsewhere in the response of the wealthier countries, there has been a clunky reliance on top-down fiat, which has often arrived dangerously late. It has been as if Ebola never happened.

A well-oiled epidemic preparedness and response system should function like the cogs on the cassette of a bike, co-ordinating to drive the evidence base forward, spurring research into action. Instead, public health and science are often forced to compete with other political priorities. Witness the partisan games being played around the re-opening of different US states, and also the tendency of politicians to frame the response as a competition, pledging, as Boris Johnson did in May, a “world-beating” contact-tracing system for a UK which is in truth rushing to catch up, or inaccurately bragging, as Donald Trump did, that “America leads the world on testing.” An effective test, track and trace strategy is definitely the way out of this mess but with a virus that has no respect for borders, “beating” other nations is beside the point.



Honouring a promise to the future: a nurse attends to an infant with Ebola symptoms

In this fractious context, despite the brilliance of many individuals working on Covid-19, the system does not co-ordinate internationally, and hence fails to run as it should. It sputters forward on the wheels of good intentions, stalling at green lights, stumbling at blind spots, and is apparently incapable of seeing far ahead down the road—or, for that matter, back to the fading memory of past crises like Ebola.

Through it all, the language of war is ubiquitous. Health workers are “heroes” “fighting on the front-lines,” PPE is “armour” and a vaccine is “a weapon,” all talk that might serve a useful political purpose in elevating potentially avoidable loss of life into a “sacrifice.” (Even if too few lessons have been drawn from the Ebola playbook, this rhetoric certainly has been. During the initial months of the current Ebola outbreak in DRC, the response effort was named, in French, *la riposte*, or “the fight,” tricky talk in a country at war).

If we do insist on deploying the language of war in this pandemic, we might also consider borrowing something else from the military: its practice of counting its losses and memorialising the dead. There are few memorials to the casualties of disease. Would the massive toll of epidemics like Ebola and now Covid-19 feel less acceptable to us if, perhaps, we gathered every year to count and honour those we have lost?

Such a ritual could attenuate our tendency to forget, and facilitate that internal processing that precedes future preparedness. It might grant us closure

and a collective touchstone; a time and a place to mourn the dead, but also to reckon with our shortcomings: our mistakes, our failings, our humanity. A way, above all else, to learn from them, not abandon them—and thereby ensure they did not die in vain.

It’s important to recognise what we have seen in Africa as progress, but were it progress enough for the world as a whole, we wouldn’t be in this fix. Were our systems more resilient, agile and prepared, and our leaders more humble, and our expert disciplines less siloed, 2020 might have gone quite differently. All of which might have been possible if we had had our eyes properly open to the last great epidemic.

Learning from past crises isn’t easy. During Ebola, I sat with more than 200 Liberians as they processed lessons. At the highest levels of public health leadership and governance, implementing change was tough, even in the immediate aftermath of a national tragedy. Yet in the face of Covid-19, Liberia rapidly closed its borders, implemented testing of cases and contacts, and opened a centre at which members of the public can voluntarily get tested. The approach has kept case counts low, although the mortality rate, sadly, is high. Here, too, political decisions are undercutting public health advice; and expertise and experience still have to contend with very limited resources.

But Donald Trump’s talk about impoverished “shithole countries” with nothing to teach us embodies a spirit of contempt for which 100,000 Americans have now paid with their lives. It is not only offensive but absurd to slur as “weak” populations that are repeatedly showing themselves to be strong—populations that, through their courage, wisdom and creativity, have steered epidemics to an end.

At the same time, we must avoid the temptation to write a singular counter-narrative that has African public health systems spectacularly succeeding where all others have failed. The truth is nuanced and, uncomfortable though that is, we must make room for it: we *all* still have a lot to learn. We might start by ditching the framing of the Covid-19 response as an international competition, and instead simply learn, with humility, from one another. We could then hope to harness the diverse experiences of our different societies, and bring it all to bear on a common threat.

Instead of casually forgetting the last tragedy, wise societies would build a mental shrine to it, marking it as a point to pause, reflect and indeed to learn. If we can achieve that sort of wisdom then we might, perhaps, see ourselves in the stories of Ebola survivors like Finda Fallah. Soon after recovering from Ebola, she told me how she woke in the night after a terrible dream. Her seven-year-old son had appeared to her. “Mama,” he cried out, “bring me some rice.” Fallah got up, climbed out of bed, and set a pot of water to boil on the fire. “I wanted to put the food on his grave and say, “my son, here is the food you asked for. But where is the grave?” she said. “No grave.” 

Katherina Thomas is a journalist, global health researcher and medical humanities practitioner

The next pandemic

The historian who saw Covid-19 coming now predicts
another disaster—this time man-made

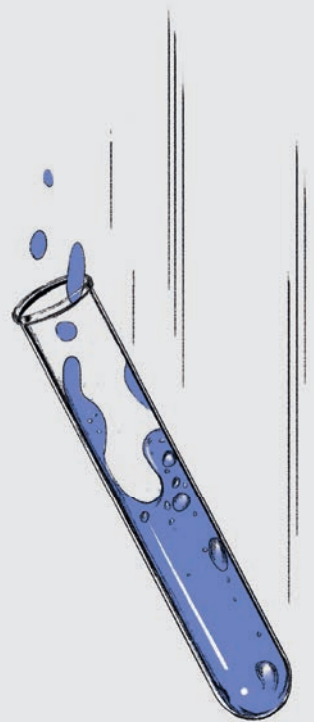
PETER FRANKOPAN

At the end of last year, I was asked to write in *Prospect* about the biggest global challenges in the coming decade. There was no question in my mind about what I would write about: pandemics and “the medical response to global pandemic—which is pitiful,” I said in an email to the editor. “And we are going to find that out soon (I fear).” My article, published in early December, said that “we live in the age of the pandemic,” and warned that the lack of international co-ordination and preparation could make a dangerous outbreak even worse.

I couldn’t have known how soon and how devastatingly this warning would be borne out. But as a historian, I had learned that pandemics were something to worry about. I had been thinking about the subject for a while, and talked about it at length when I was asked into several government ministries to discuss post-Brexit Britain in December and early January.

The past has often shown how a deadly disease can take hold after a pathogen leaps between species, but multiple factors need to lock into place for it to spread effectively, and reach pandemic proportions. Globalisation ramps up the risks. In particular, the same travel and transportation that allows for more exchange, movement and transmission of goods and people than ever before in history, also provides more vectors than ever for the spread of infections. These could expose the fragility of interlocking economies with potentially devastating effects. The way that this coronavirus has done just that is astonishing: almost half of the world’s labour force have either lost their jobs, or else seen much or all of their income vanish.

There is, however, a worse nightmare to consider than natural pestilence being amplified by globalisation. Many countries around the world conduct research into emerging infectious diseases and into potentially dangerous biological threats. What would happen if something went badly wrong in one of their laboratories?



“Yes I have,” said President Trump at the end of April, when asked if he had seen evidence that the Covid-19 virus ravaging the world had originated in a lab in China. Asked what he had been told, he replied: “I can’t tell you that. I’m not allowed to tell you that.”

At the end of May, the pandemic had claimed 100,000 American lives, and infections were racing towards two million. Several weeks earlier, a leaked report from the Federal Emergency Management Agency had shone a light on the unfolding disaster, and questions about the administration’s competence were being asked. The president was keen to find a scapegoat and use it as much as he could.

With an economy in freefall and an election to fight in a matter of months, pointing the finger of blame at America’s rival, China, and encouraging talk of compensation (“we haven’t decided the final amount yet,” Trump said) was an obvious way to deflect attention. All the more so because of the chronic mistakes China made in the first phase of the virus’s detection that enabled it to spread in Hubei province, in the rest of the country and around the globe. And in a deeply connected digital world, whipping up fake news and conspiracies often pays dividends. The fact that a substantial part of the global population is still under some form of lockdown creates captive audiences ready to pore over, accuse and tweet fringe views that propagate just like a virus does.

But those who know what they are talking about have been emphatic that Covid-19 is extremely unlikely to have started with a laboratory mishap. A paper published in *Nature* in March demonstrated that “the genetic data irrefutably shows that the virus is not derived from any previously used virus backbone,” and therefore has occurred in the wild, probably “by natural selection in an animal host before zoonotic transfer, or natural selection in humans following zoonotic transfer.”

As Anthony Fauci, director of the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, put it in an interview with *National Geographic* at the start of May: the evidence “is very, very strongly leaning toward [the conclusion that the virus] could not have been artificially or deliberately manipulated.” The best evolutionary biologists who had worked on the virus, he added, “have said that everything about the stepwise evolution over time strongly indicates that it evolved in nature and then jumped species.”

Asked if perhaps the virus had first occurred naturally, then been brought to a lab to study and escaped, Fauci was dismissive. If that was the case, he said, then we are back to square one and there is no need to blame a laboratory release in the first place: “that means it was in the wild to begin with. That’s why I don’t get what they’re talking about.”

But just because Donald Trump says something false, it doesn’t follow that it *couldn’t* be true. While the development of biological weapons is prohibited by the Biological Weapons Convention that

entered into force in 1975 and to which almost every country on earth is a signatory (those who have not ratified or signed include Chad, Israel, Namibia and Tuvalu), research into them for purposes of “defence” is found across much of the world. Some of the most sensitive work is done in military facilities, with the aim not only of better understanding threats but to enable lines of defence to be prepared in the event of a deliberate or accidental release. The mandate of the US Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases, for example, is to “protect the war fighter from biological threats.”

“Everything about the virus’s stepwise evolution over time strongly indicates that it evolved in nature and then jumped species”

Security at such installations is, not surprisingly, extremely high, as are the sensitivities about their research programmes. There is inevitably a grey zone where the boundaries are blurred between prevention and development of threats that are potentially viable as offensive tools. As a result, it would be reasonable to assume that the chances of an accidental release from such a facility are minimal. They are not.

“These are not the first times that we’ve had a world exposed to viruses as a result of failures in a Chinese lab,” tweeted Trump’s Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on 3rd May. And, about the past at least, he was right. In 2004, safety procedures at the Chinese Institute of Virology in Beijing were breached on at least two occasions, resulting in a fresh outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (Sars)—the original wave had struck in 2002—that infected nine and killed one.

The response, on that occasion, involved taking measures to contain the spread of the disease: lockdown of those who might come into contact with people who had been infected; social isolation; and contact tracing, including in Anhui province where the index patient (the first infected) travelled to visit family.

These measures were enough to stop the outbreak spreading further. They were investigated at the time by the World Health Organisation, which looked into how the virus had been let out and why there had been a delay of a month between the date of first infection and the announcement of the index case. The aim was to learn lessons that would stop another, potentially worse, accident taking place in the future.

In January 2018, US officials reported concerns that suggested that these lessons had not been fully noted. On a visit to the Wuhan Institute of Virology, the first in China to achieve the top level for international bio-research safety, high-ranking US visitors remarked in a cable to Washington on “a serious shortage of appropriately trained technicians and investigators needed to safely operate this high-containment laboratory.” ▶



This meant there was a chance of an accidental release of a virus, and an ensuing threat to public health.

These lax safety standards do not seem to have played a role in this crisis. However, it is revealing that Shi Zhengli, one of the lead researchers into bats and emerging infectious disease in Wuhan, was reported to have breathed a sigh of relief when tests on the genetic material of Covid-19 did not show a match between the sequence of the virus and those that she and her team had been sampling. “That really took a load off my mind,” she said. “I had not slept a wink for days.” It did not come from the lab—but it might have.

“In one British lab it was found there had been 40 mishaps within two years, including live dengue virus being sent through the post”

This flirtation with catastrophe is not unique to China. Just as zoonotic transfers (or species leaps) can happen in any part of the world, so too are breaches of protocols a regular occurrence. So regular, in fact, that they are accidents waiting to happen. One could even say it was miraculous that we have not already been through a global pandemic as a result.

In September last year, for example, there was an explosion at the Russian State Research Centre of Virology and Biotechnology in Koltsovo, just outside Novosibirsk in south-western Siberia. The “Vektor” facility is not only Russia’s leading centre for research into biological warfare, but also one of only two places in the world that stores the deadly smallpox virus that killed hundreds of millions of people over many centuries, until it was finally eradicated in the 1970s.

The cause of the explosion, according to a statement on Vektor’s homepage, was a gas canister that blew up during repair works to a sanitary inspection room. No biohazardous materials were released, continued the statement, although it was reported that fire spread through the building’s ventilation system.

A close shave—but it is worth reflecting on breaches nearer to home. In the UK, there are multiple labs that handle viruses and bacteria. Between June 2015 and July 2017 there were 40 mishaps, including live dengue virus being sent through the post and live meningitis-causing germs being handled by students by mistake. Although the Health and Safety Executive stated that “the sector has a good health and safety record, with a high level of control of the most hazardous organisms,” the fact that accidents, mishaps and breaches took place on average once every 20 days says otherwise.

And then there is the US itself. What Mike Pompeo did not say is that the US military’s own principal biological warfare laboratory at Fort Detrick in Maryland was forced to shut down last summer after being served with a “letter of concern” and then a “cease and desist” order by the Centers for Disease Control

and Prevention (CDC) following routine inspections in June. Although little information was given at the time, other than that “deficiencies” had been discovered, an inspection report revealed a failure by the army laboratory to “implement and maintain containment procedures sufficient to contain select agents or toxins,” that staff failed to implement biosafety and containment protocols and a new chemical decontamination system leaked because of mechanical failures.

The lab, which was authorised to handle agents such as Ebola, plague and Venezuelan equine encephalitis, had its licence revoked and its staff ordered to re-train. It was also told to address the problems that had been identified during the inspections. Although the Fort Detrick lab was allowed to partially re-open towards the end of 2019, its scientists were only cleared to re-commence activities on a “full scope of research on infectious diseases” on 23rd March this year.

Then there is France, where the prestigious Institut Pasteur in Paris signed a co-operation agreement in 2017 with (you guessed it) the Wuhan Institute of Virology to do research into infectious, tropical and neglected diseases. The French institute had been forced to account for shortcomings in its operations in 2014, when it was accused of not being able to provide lists of personnel with relevant authorisation, of not having freezers secured, of being unable to provide video footage, and of not responding to requests for information from the authorities for two months.

More of a concern than these breaches, however, was that 2,349 vials of samples of the deadly Sars virus had gone missing in 2014. They had probably been destroyed said the Institute’s Director General, Christian Bréchet. And even if they had not, he went on, the freezer in which they were being stored had broken down a few days’ earlier, which would have likely rendered them harmless. There was “zero” chance of a risk to public health, concluded the institute’s own investigation.

Humans have always lived in fear of communicable diseases: they have been the dominant predator in history. Even before Covid-19, such diseases were responsible for almost 60 per cent of all deaths in Africa. It is both reasonable and important that the finest scientific minds around the world should be researching such diseases and working out how best to neutralise and eliminate them.

But we all know that to err is human—and that accidents happen. They certainly do not have to happen in laboratories to pose a threat. They can take place in wet markets. Or in plague foci that become more active because of changing climate patterns. We should have no illusions that we continue to skate on thin ice, as we have done throughout human history. And that will not end if—or rather when—the natural disaster of Covid-19 is defeated in the laboratories of the world. For the next pandemic might well begin in them. **P**

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Cause for concern: top, workers at a laboratory in Fort Detrick, Maryland, which was forced to shut last summer after it failed inspection standards; bottom, a man stands outside the Institut Pasteur, Paris, which lost 2,349 samples of Sars in 2014





Prospect Portrait

A rooted life

From glamorous jeweller to an icon of British gardening, **Monty Don** has led an unconventional life. And at 64, he still has plenty to say

ALICE VINCENT

ILLUSTRATION BY TIM MCDONAGH

The fine, dry April that passed earlier this year, in a surreal blaze of lockdown, was the first that Monty Don has spent at home in five years. One of the great ironies of being the nation's favourite gardener is that there is often not the time to luxuriate in one's own garden. But the presence of Don, who will be 65 in July, is reliably felt in millions of others. His 21 books, published over the past 30 years, have frequently been at the top of horticultural bestseller lists—this spring his *Down to Earth* is in pole position on Amazon's UK sales list. He has more than 600,000 social media followers. He is the face of the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, and, more famously, the host of the BBC's flagship *Gardeners' World*.

To engage with gardening in the UK today is to engage, unavoidably, with Monty. And when gardening occupies such a sacred spot in the national mindset, the Don supremacy can be contentious. While his predecessors—the pipe-smoking Percy Thrower and the chipper, can-do Alan Titchmarsh—seemed at home in suburbia, Don took *Gardeners' World* to his own sprawling, oft-flooded, semi-wild Herefordshire garden, Longmeadow. He's a lifelong proponent of organic gardening and his dismissal of pesticides, weed-killer and peat is deemed unsupportive and unrealistic by many in the horticultural industry.

While such ruggedness has made growing-your-own fashionably sexy for the

masses, it is sniffed at by an old guard, who regard Don—and his lack of formal training—as bogus. Other critics declare him too posh, too dreamy, tucked away in the countryside with his two acres of land. But during lockdown, for all those suddenly newly-dependent on their gardens, balconies or window boxes for solace, Don's easy-going approach makes him a hero. Though filmed without a crew due to social distancing measures, *Gardeners' World* has provided a soothingly familiar balm in a frightening and shapeshifting landscape. It has also enjoyed its highest viewing figures in a decade.

Despite his primetime prominence, Don still sees himself primarily as a writer “who happens to have lots of television work.” (And in his younger days, he actually wrote a couple of novels though, in his own words, he soon “destroyed” them because they were “excruciatingly bad.”) He is finishing his next book, about wildlife at Longmeadow, when we speak over the phone, and so I picture him at the desk that he has described in his books, in a converted hop kiln, with the beds of his adored dogs at his feet.

Outside, Don's gardens, as seen on television, seem all the larger for their many different compartments: the mound, the wildlife garden, the orchard, the “writing garden,” the damp garden, the veg garden, the jewel garden, the paradise garden, the woodland garden among them.

There's an unrestrained ease, a giddy wildness about them all—the box hedge has blight, wigwams are constructed from pruning offcuts. Green-fingered traditionalists on *Gardeners' World* forums cluck that it's a mess, that too much is crammed in. But everyone else dreams of nurturing something similar.

By documenting this backyard—in books, on *Gardeners' World*, daily on social media—Don has allowed fans a glimpse behind the garden wall of what is, in many ways, a deeply private life. No wonder he gets asked technical questions the world over. “You could be on a street in Tokyo and someone will say, ‘I've got this plant on my windowsill...’” he told me. “There is this absolute knee-jerk thing that they feel they can ask you a question. Which can't be true of all television programmes. Somehow with gardening it is.”

Don admits that this familiarity, the well-meaning questions, can get behind the avuncular demeanour—and under the skin. And on those occasions when he's not away working, he likes to be at home, in the Tudor-framed doer-upper that he moved into, in 1992, with his wife, Sarah—an architect who has long kept the fires burning and greenhouses tidy during his frequent absences—and their three now-grown children. “The truth is I don't go out and about very much,” he told me. “I certainly never go for a meal locally, I don't go to pubs.” At home, and with friends, Monty is Montagu, and there is one rule: don't talk about work. ▶

Born George Montagu Don in Germany in 1955 (alongside a twin sister, Alison), by the age of 10 he had lost his first name. His “tyrannical” paternal grandfather, also called George, refused to have his own name associated with “Montagu,” a name he deemed preposterous. Don’s father Denis was an army major who left the forces when Don was five, and “never really found his feet in civvy life,” Don said on *Desert Island Discs* in 2006. Janet, his mother, declared that once her children had reached the age of five, she wished she wouldn’t have to see them again until adulthood, a wish the English public school system can go a long way towards fulfilling. “I’m certain she loved all of us, but she found it hard to show it,” he said, adding that he doesn’t “remember being cuddled much.” It sounds like the sort of reflection that might take years of therapy to unearth, and with Don there is always an air of uneasy depths, a sense that the “nature cure” is far more than a fashionable phrase.

He was expected to work hard in childhood. Janet set her five children checklists of chores: “chop wood, fill the coal scuttles, feed the chickens, wash up, gather vegetables for lunch, mow the lawn, weed the strawberries,” Don recalled in his 2016 book, *Nigel: My Family and Other Dogs*, and it instilled in him a Puritan work ethic that would emerge again with adulthood.

He grew up in an inherited pile in Hampshire—five acres, cottages on the house’s grounds—against the gloom of his father’s money worries and “profound” depression. Freedom came in the woods that surrounded the village, where Don would walk the family dogs for hours. At seven, he was sent to boarding school, thanks to a trust fund left by his grandfather. Home, he wrote, became “an absence, a heartache, where all the things I loved lived.”

Rebellion followed soon after: the self-confessed “black sheep” of the family, he was kicked out of schools until he wound up at a comprehensive in Basingstoke. Encountering girls for the first time at college, he flunked his A-Levels. But he also had an epiphany that would remain a solace for the rest of his life: that gardening made him “completely content” in a life where little else was.

It wouldn’t, yet, make him rich. While his classmates were going to university, Don took a job at a pig farm, working

there in the mornings and spending the afternoons going through old Oxbridge entrance exams. At 21—the age when friends who had stayed on the conveyor belt would graduate—he was accepted to Magdalene College, Cambridge, after spending eight months in Provence, gardening for an eccentric old woman in exchange for lunch and lessons in worldliness.

“We were like those sticks of asparagus that come white out of the tin, and here was someone full of life, with blood in his veins,” remembers Adam Nicolson, the writer and grandson of the author and garden designer Vita Sackville-West, who met Don while they were both reading English. “He was amazingly alluring. Very vigorous, like a Thomas Hardy figure.” Don was the kind of student who took a Labrador (named Gretel) with him to university. Having stayed up late drinking whisky, he would drunkenly weep to taped recordings of birdsong posted to him by his father. It was at Cambridge that Don would meet Sarah, who was married to one of the others in his rowing crew, until she divorced after falling for Don. They married a few years later, a week after Don “rowed Sarah out to sea, and refused to row back unless she agreed to marry me.”

“Home, he wrote, became ‘an absence, a heartache, where all the things I loved lived’”

A smattering of occupations followed—being a bin man, a London School of Economics postgrad drop-out and a waiter at Soho restaurant Joe Allen—before Don and Sarah set up a jewellery company, Monty Don. Sarah had nurtured an interest in jewellery while living in Papua New Guinea, aged 19, with her first husband; after training in silversmithing, she and Don decided to make a business of it. Their garish designs captured the excessive appetites of 80s largesse and were worn by Princess Diana and Alexandra Shulman, the former editor of *British Vogue*. “Monty Don earrings were hugely desirable in the mid-eighties,” Shulman told me. “They were very much a part of the scene then when costume jewellery came back into fashion.”

Don admits that “it *was* really glamorous.” He spent those days dressed top-to-toe in black and “covered in jewellery,” according to his wife. “We could always

get a cab because he looked so amazing,” she wrote in their joint memoir, *The Jewel Garden*. He said they somehow “thought it was normal to hang out with pop stars and film stars.” Only, it wasn’t. The 1987 stock market crash and then the ratcheting up of interest rates the following year ensured a devastatingly swift end to Monty Don Jewellery that left the couple—who chose to pay back creditors, rather than declare bankruptcy—with a decade’s worth of debt and three children under five, ditching their De Beauvoir end-of-terrace for a crumbling ruin of a house in Herefordshire.

“That failure is key to understanding him,” said Allan Jenkins, who edited Don for 17 years at the *Observer*. “The first failure was at school, then the business. It’s left him with a sort of insecurity.”

Don brings it up swiftly when we speak, shortly after I ask if the frequent claims of his workaholicism are legitimate. “We had to sell everything we owned, including our house, our furniture, everything. Literally everything we had to sell, we did sell,” he told me. “That was a pretty traumatic experience. I don’t think that ever leaves you. That spectre is always slightly over your shoulders, you want to go against it.”

Unemployed and with bailiffs at the door, Don started the 1990s in a cloud of debilitating depression. Sarah, who was also struggling with crippling ill-health, in her case physical, gave him an ultimatum: to go and see a doctor, or the marriage is over.

“He’s capable of incredible unhappiness at the same time as this large embrace of the world and all its beauties,” said his old university friend Nicolson. “How those two things are related I don’t really know, but it’s very important for who he is, that they co-exist.”

Then, a combination of Prozac, time and the enormous challenge of transforming two acres of “scrubby, abandoned field” into Longmeadow, lifted the gloom. Don still suffers from depression now, particularly during winter months, but said he has “learned how to manage it.” Work, keeping busy, helps considerably. “Sarah always says that nothing has made me weller than success,” he told me, with a wry laugh. “It’s really crass but it’s much easier to feel mentally healthy if the world is going your way.”

And by the mid-1990s things did start going his way. A few writing gigs interrupted two years on the dole, including a piece about his escape to the country for



Crown jewels: Monty and Sarah, top, in their jewellery workshop in 1983; below, Don receiving his OBE from Prince Charles in 2018

the *Daily Mail*. He then landed a column in the *Observer* and his first regular television gig on ITV's *This Morning*. Richard Madeley, who co-presented with his wife Judy Finnigan, still remembers Don's first day. "The first thing that occurred to both of us was how all the women really fancied him. Here was this horny-handed son of the soil coming in. He had this sort of Mellors kind of sex appeal," Madeley said, referring to gamekeeper Oliver Mellors, the titular character of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

Much like his history as a fashion darling, Don's sturdy good looks have, at times, been used as a stick to beat him with. "He was the perfect contrast to the age of Titchmarsh," said Jenkins. "He was handsome, he was hot and he was good with his hands. I think he played to it." Don still maintains a roguishness younger than his 64 years. When he joined in with the recent viral #MeAt20 challenge on Twitter, he stuck up a photograph of him brooding against the door of a Hebridean bothy with a Jack Russell around his neck, a typical response read: "Gosh, I almost fainted."

While Titchmarsh stayed mostly focused on people's back gardens, occasionally traipsing onto English country estates to draw inspiration or pick up a few tips, Don has roamed the world like a kind floricultural Michael Palin, taking viewers to foreign climes including Mexico, Morocco and Japan in series such as *Around the World in 80 Gardens*.

But appearances and exotic backdrops only get you so far; Don has a genuine passion for the earth, for plants, and a knack for making it infectious. He knew things, too. "In terms of his expert knowledge, he was quite innovative," said Madeley. "He'd be telling you stuff that nobody really knew, and he was right."

And there is no doubting Don's passion for protecting the land, rooted in having watched a kind of arcadia "literally being ripped up in front of my eyes" in boyhood. "Hedgerows going, wildflowers going, birds disappearing, trees being cut down," he said. "In today's climate it is unbelievable what farmers got away with then in the name of greater productivity." At 18 he "was the youngest by about 40 years" when something stirred him to attend a meeting of the Campaign to Protect Rural England "in somebody's rectory in Hampshire" and realised he felt an "affinity with what they were talking about. Surely, we should be looking ▶

after the natural world and working with it, rather than destroying it in the name of commerce.”

In the era of climate crisis, such sentiments are going mainstream. But this was in the 1970s, when, Don said, “it was either dangerously Marxist or just uninformed. People would scoff at you, and look down at you and say, ‘When you grow up, you’ll understand.’ And if somebody says that to me, I want to fucking hit them. So very quickly, instead of joining [some] very conservative people with the right ideals, it became a rebellion.”

That attitude still gets him in trouble now. As well as raging at the use of chemicals and peat for profit margins, he keeps himself in the headlines with unpopular, and sometimes unthinking, social media updates. There have also been skirmishes with the BBC over pest control on *Gardeners’ World*. “Without being too grand,” he said in a statement at the time, “it is my show. With my views and my methods of gardening.”

He remains as outspoken on the Chelsea Flower Show, the centrepiece of the BBC’s annual coverage. “It’s a strange and rum do, this funny cross between a village fête and the Trooping of Colour,” he said with entertaining precision. “There’s no question that it is the highlight of the gardening year. But there’s also no question that it is horrendously overcrowded, that it’s based upon money and sponsorship and our relationship with broadcasters. I mean, a flower show, that has something like 17 hours of television a week on it, really?” He said the BBC would be better spending the money on “other gardening programmes, whether encouraging young people or different things.” Due to Covid-19, Chelsea went virtual this year, which may or may not prompt the corporation to rethink. But it takes some chutzpah for someone whose own success also relies on “our relationship with broadcasters”—indeed, to someone who is handsomely paid for fronting Chelsea itself—to point this out.

I prod him on those *Gardeners’ World* viewers who maintain that, as veteran gardening broadcaster Peter Seabrook once said, that Don “can’t garden.” He eventually rounds in on a reply: “I suppose the nub of your question is to what extent my own self-image is based on being the Bad Boy, bucking the trend. And I guess it is. But I’m much more interested in trying to see it through. I really like the opportunity to try and teach people that they

can make beautiful spaces and look after this world without having to be disruptive. The two are not incompatible.”

It’s this kind of thing that’s made Don one of horticulture’s more intriguing personalities: he doesn’t just tell how to grow your veg, he shows you why you should do it organically—something that genuinely matters at a time when insect populations are diminishing rapidly.



Don’s sidekick on *Gardeners’ World*, Nigel, right, died earlier this year

Don is not though—quite—in the militant mould when it comes to the climate crisis. “You don’t get anywhere by alienating people. If you stop people from going to work, they’re just going to get pissed off. I think the great danger of groups like Extinction Rebellion is the self-satisfaction and smugness of the moral high ground, which justifies other people’s suffering.”

“We should be looking after the natural world and working with it, rather than destroying it in the name of commerce”

He is in the midst of one of several long answers. Don speaks as he does on television. He vocalises his thoughts elegantly; the parables tumble out with the energy of a bounding Labrador, landing with heavy emphasis. “They’ll say, ‘it’s not real suffering, our planet is suffering, so what does it matter if you miss a holiday.’ And

until you realise that human happiness is made up of little things, and you do respect that and look after it, then I don’t think you’re going to win hearts and minds.”

Ah, happiness. Ever since clocking that sowing carrots eased his teenage angst, Don has known he can find it in the soil, “from the garden, the dogs, listening to birdsong.” During those glittering, good times in the 1980s, he and Sarah would still spend every Sunday in their London back garden. “We were talking about it the other day, they were truly happy days. The happiest times.” Perhaps, but not sustainably so.

He broke a seal when he wrote about his depression in 2000, for the *Observer*. Jenkins, who commissioned him, said it “changed the way that people saw him.” Don confirms: “There was a very immediate response of people writing to me... “And I realised there was a great pool of unhappiness because people felt they couldn’t talk about it.” It was a few years later, while speaking at an event at the nearby Hay Festival, when he was touched by the bravery of “young men from farming communities” standing up to ask about mental health, that Don realised “that one must never stop championing it. I’m in an incredibly privileged position to be able to talk about these things.”

And one suspects he will continue to do so for some time. While he may say he’s old enough to “guide other people to make the noise—I don’t have to be the irritant screwing up the party,” he won’t be passing *Gardeners’ World*’s top job over to Adam Frost—his current deputy—any time soon: he’s just signed another three-year contract with the BBC. “The way I try to make that work is by constantly reinventing it,” he said, letting the steel crest through the surface. “I try to make each programme the last, the best, really keep the edge sharp.” Has BBC gardening ever sought a sharp edge before?

But there it is, that determination—perhaps the only bit of Montagu that Don succeeds in keeping buried. Just as quickly as it appears, like a glinting spade that briefly surfaces before being sunk below the surface again, and he regales me with more wistful things, such as his garden, and those tulips. “If I died tomorrow, at least I would have seen them flower,” Don says. “That’s enough.” **12**

Alice Vincent is the author of *Rootbound: Rewilding a Life* (Canongate)



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Breaking point

Mental health services were already overstretched.
Then coronavirus hit

EMILY REYNOLDS

ILLUSTRATION BY MATT HARRISON CLOUGH

Even if you don't personally live with the same problems that many of us do, then a moment's reflection will reveal how the current crisis of physical health will inevitably bear on mental health too. With millions infected by Covid-19 and hundreds of thousands dead around the world, no area of life has gone unaffected: businesses closed, jobs lost, friends separated, relatives grieving. And these are merely the more obvious effects. Beyond the lost lives and livelihoods there is a ubiquitous worry about getting sick, plus a pervasive sense of uncertainty, insecurity and gnawing anxiety that has seeped through the locked-down economy. In the UK, around nine million people are expected to be furloughed, many of them facing an agonisingly precarious future. Sinking incomes have already translated into around a million new claims for universal credit, a new benefit that was synonymous with delays and hardship before the sudden crisis hit it.

Meanwhile, those who are still in demand from employers have different problems, whether it's NHS and care staff with inadequate personal protective equipment (PPE) or manual and service workers who can't afford not to work, can't do so from home, and must now set off with no greater protection against the virus than gratingly cheerful government advice about "staying alert" and, if possible, somehow getting there without catching the bus. No wonder that even those without any history of mental illness are starting to feel the strain.



Beyond control

"Because there's no vaccine or known way of getting to the other side, the level of uncertainty is through the roof," explains therapist Simon Coombs. "At the moment, we have no control. So for someone who's never really struggled... they've really been dropped in at the deep end."

Jon, an office worker from Sheffield in his late 30s, had previously supported friends and an ex-partner through various issues with their mental health. But, until the coronavirus pandemic, he had never struggled himself. "I feel quite naive now," he says, "because I thought that looking after people who weren't well meant I understood what it was like to feel so anxious and depressed." He laughs. "I really didn't."

Finances weigh heavily on his mind. Laid off from his job because of Covid-19, Jon has relied on bits and pieces of freelance work to get by. But these are few and far between, and when he and his flatmate requested a rent reduction from their landlord, they were rejected. "I'm already living off my savings," he says. "And trust me, there isn't much of them."

A persistently low mood came first, then problems with sleep. Normally a fairly regular sleeper, Jon has recently been averaging two to three hours a night, worrying about money and work and feeling so anxious "it makes me physically nauseous." "Then the next day I feel like a zombie—I can't do anything except lie in bed or sit on the sofa looking at my phone," he says. "I would say, 100 per cent, that this is the lowest point of my life by far."

"I live in a flat with no garden and I'm not really near any substantial green space, so I'm spending a lot of time on my own indoors," he continues. He has a flatmate (who he gets on with), but her job has moved entirely to home working, so she's busy during the day: "I don't like to bother her," Jon explains. Now, for the first time in his life, Jon is seriously considering seeing a therapist.

A British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy survey underlines that Jon is not alone. Ninety-eight per cent of counsellors said that coronavirus has come up in therapy with both new and regular clients. A minority reported a significant increase in clients since lockdown began, which is pretty striking given the impossibility of in-person appointments, and the need for new patients to navigate the whole process online. The picture is just as grim in surveys of patients rather than practitioners. Rethink Mental Illness found that 80 per cent of those living with severe conditions had felt their mental health worsen due to coronavirus; 28 per cent said their health was "much worse."

Loss, debt, ongoing economic uncertainty and anxiety about personal health will all create a need for counselling after lockdown ends, as over 20 organisations representing 65,000 professionals—including the British Psychoanalytic Council, Cruse Bereavement Care and the Association of Child Psychotherapists—wrote in an open letter to Health Secretary Matt Hancock in May. But "supporting the nation through the coronavirus crisis" with the help of counselling and therapy, as the professionals urged, is not looking like a straightforward task. For one, many practitioners are self-employed themselves, and likely to be struggling to keep their own businesses afloat. And for clients, access is always limited. Though therapists charge a range of fees, the average is somewhere between £50 to £120 per hour, with low-cost

options limited; even these can cost up to £20, and £10 sessions with trainee psychotherapists are few and far between. Shut out from receiving private therapy, those living in poverty are often left to endure long NHS waits alone. One 2018 survey found some patients had waited up to 13 years for support, with waits of many months common. And as demand grows, the waiting lists will now soar in parallel.

"I can barely afford rent," Jon says. "How am I supposed to pay for therapy?"

Talk Talk

Long a taboo, mental health has suddenly been something of a buzzphrase over the last few years, with stigma-busting campaigns such as Time to Talk making headway in confronting stereotypes. Indeed, "talking" is at the heart of many campaigns: Get Britain Talking, for example, urged ITV viewers to open up.

Wider media interest is rising too—a 2018 Mind survey found coverage had rocketed by 22 per cent in a mere 12 months. There have been more news reports, more interviews where celebrities

"open up" and more storylines on TV soaps. Prince William and the Duchess of Cambridge Kate Middleton have made mental health central to their platform, promoting "kindness and self-care" through their Heads Together campaign, and both William and his brother Harry have spoken publicly about their struggles after the death of their mother in a way that would have been unthinkable for the stiff-upper lip royals of past generations.

It's hard to criticise such campaigns—it's better to talk than stay silent. But by focusing on milder conditions and general "wellbeing," the new interest still tends to look away from the experience of many with more severe or chronic conditions—personality disorders, schizophrenia and others. "Kindness and self-care," whether promoted by the younger royals or not, is unlikely to much change the life of someone experiencing psychosis.

But are words replacing action? All the new positive talk has come in parallel with a long squeeze on NHS finances and outright cuts to many welfare services. You might be eager to talk about your mental health, but even if you can persuade a GP this is a good idea, it'll often be months until you see a psychiatrist or NHS psychotherapist. Former prime minister Theresa May's efforts to reduce the "stigma" around talking about mental health made an important point, but was it just a coincidence that she pushed that theme quite so hard after long years of austerity? "It is always wrong for people to assume that the only answer to these issues is about funding," May said. Perhaps, but funding matters, too. All the talk about talking took responsibility away from the state and pushed it back onto individuals.

Though a lot of noise has been made about mental health spending in the last few years, much of it has been hot air. Having been savagely squeezed, the trumpeted largesse to mental health trusts has often done nothing more than make up for previous cuts, often inadequately. Shortages are rife, with a 30 per cent slump in the number of beds for mental health patients. In the past 10 years, the UK has lost 6,000 mental health nurses—nearly 11 per cent of the workforce. In 2019, the UN special rapporteur on health released a report that concluded that austerity measures in the UK had significantly contributed to poor mental health. ▶

**"Kindness and self-care
are unlikely to change
the life of someone
experiencing psychosis"**

There have also been ongoing issues with “off-rolling” patients once they leave hospital. Secondary services—community mental health or crisis and recovery teams—have long supported people after discharge. But according to a report from Manchester Mind published in October 2019, cuts to services now routinely place this responsibility at the door of GPs who are ill-equipped to deal with serious mental illness. When people have no one to turn to who knows how to support them, it predictably leads to more intense distress—and in some cases death, whether from suicide, neglect of physical health or from accidents such as drug overdoses or alcohol abuse. All this forms the backdrop to the emerging mental strain from the pandemic, and threatens to combine with it to produce the perfect storm.

A little less conversation

No part of the NHS was prepared for coronavirus. In 2016, when an operation named Exercise Cygnus simulated an influenza pandemic in the UK, the findings were stark. There were serious gaps in resources, including a lack of ventilators, PPE and critical care beds—all problems the NHS has faced since the pandemic hit. But away from the respiratory care “frontline,” less thought was given to the preparedness of mental health services, and they were never likely to fare well. And indeed, in late April, a survey commissioned by the Royal College of Psychiatrists found that 23 per cent of psychiatrists had no access to PPE at all, and that only half of those who had wanted tests had been able to get one.

The suffering isn’t restricted to hospitals. Access to services in the community has also decreased; some staff have had to take on outside caring responsibilities or have been ill themselves, leading to shortages. And with face-to-face appointments out of the question, much now relies on patchy provision of digital or phone consultations.

“Stay at home” messages have certainly played an important role in tackling the spread of the virus, but they have also contributed to many eschewing medical services they really need. One woman I spoke to told me that she’d avoided A&E after needing a self-harm wound sutured. “In normal circumstances I definitely would have considered it serious enough to go to A&E,” she said. “But, as I’m sure lots of other people who have presented at A&E with a mental health crisis can attest, you don’t always get a great reception there when you’ve self-harmed, and I just couldn’t face it at this point. I didn’t want to feel like I was wasting their time, or like I shouldn’t be there, or like I was putting other people at risk by going to hospital.” She had her own concerns about catching the virus too, worrying she’d have a higher chance of contracting it if she went. She dealt with her cuts herself.

Sean Duggan, Chief Executive of the NHS Confederation’s Mental Health Network, confirms that referrals, which typically come through GPs, have dropped off recently. “We went through a stage where there was a bit of capacity in the system, not so many people referring [to GPs],” he says. He suggests “it was a combination of people frightened to refer and deciding to stay at home to protect themselves and the NHS—they were self-caring instead.” But now, Duggan believes, mental health services need to prepare for things to change fast, with “a huge demand on all of our services.” “I worry that we’ll predict a surge in demand for mental health services [and prepare for it], but that the demand will be

even more than that,” he says. “The problem is that we don’t know, and I’m worried about that.”

Many who have suffered with mental health problems in the past will now be retraumatised or triggered by isolation or worry; problems left untreated in lockdown will foment and worsen; and—meanwhile—insecurity, hardship, isolation and grief will push previously “stable” people into distress. Although it’s impossible to know how many more people are going to be affected, many conversations I’ve had suggest that there may already be a rise in the number of people seeking help who had previously had no contact with mental health services before now.

If patients were sometimes waiting years to access therapies and services before, how long will they have to wait now—and how will the services cope? An optimist might point to the hero-worship of healthcare workers, and the way that a resistant Boris Johnson eventually conceded to exempt the health and care staff from the “NHS surcharge” imposed on overseas workers applying for leave to remain. This might be taken as evidence that political self-interest, if nothing else, will finally move the government to show some generosity towards public services.

But the virus, the lockdown and the furlough scheme will plunge the government deep into the red, which will make it harder to hold out much hope that decent funding will be provided on a sustainable basis. And it’s not just money that prevents governments from supporting mental health programmes, but also a lack of understanding. Johnson has shown a questionable grasp of mental health issues: in a much-criticised *Telegraph* column last year, the

prime minister asserted the one reliable “cure is work,” suggesting anyone struggling should be inspired by Winston Churchill’s “almost superhuman production of books, speeches and articles,” which “pitchforked off his depression.” This is offensive bluster, of course, but in the Covid-19 economy the reality is that many people will have no work. And with no certainty around who will be able to access services, or the kind of care we’ll receive when we do, many are wondering what—if anything—they can do to improve their situation.

When someone is struggling to cope, they need more than the tips for general wellbeing beloved of some campaigns. In and of themselves, they are no bad thing: it goes without saying that taking care of your health and doing things that make you calm and happy are good. If taking a bath makes you relax after a difficult day, bathe away; drink your herbal tea, talk to your friends, learn to knit, buy that mindful colouring book. But the new battalion of mental health talking heads—celebrities, politicians and princes—are likely to be shielded from hardship and inequality; it is time we heard much more from those who truly are at the sharp end.

As those of us with severe or chronic conditions can tell you, the mainstream idea of “self-care” is not going to make a difference; the same goes if you’re homeless or don’t have a job, if you experience daily racism or find yourself forced to choose between heating and eating. “Be kind to yourself” might be a nice sentiment, but it’s almost meaningless: a toothless slogan that says absolutely nothing about people’s real lives and experiences. Yes, it’s good to talk. But as we begin to discuss the sheer scale of the unanswered need, we must be fully prepared for an awkward conversation. **12**

Emily Reynolds’s books include *“A Beginner’s Guide to Losing Your Mind”* (Yellow Kite)

“In the Covid-19 economy, the reality is that many people will have no work”

Prospect

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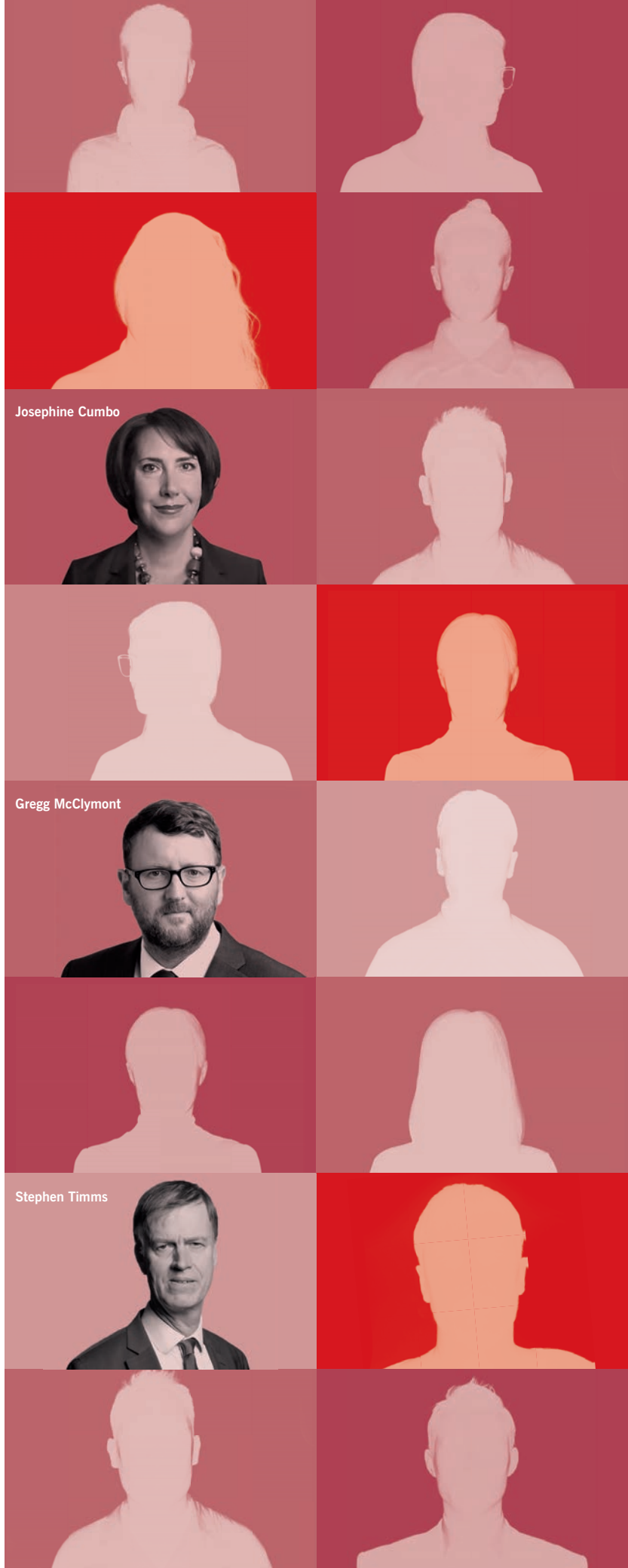
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American carnage

Joe Biden hopes to beat Trump through old-fashioned politics, and then restore some old-fashioned normality to the United States. But have the country's furious divisions made that impossible?

SAM TANENHAUS

The last week of May 2020—one of the most horrific in American history—may also be remembered as the week in which the election of 2020 was decided.

It started calmly enough. On Monday 25th May, Memorial Day, the presumptive Democratic nominee for president Joseph Biden appeared at a veterans' war memorial near his home in Delaware. Biden was with his wife Jill, and was carrying a wreath. Like millions of other Americans, he has been following "stay at home" orders and it was the first time he had been glimpsed in the flesh outside his immediate neighbourhood, where he walks and bikes, in more than two months.

And it was only a glimpse. The Bidens' appearance was unannounced. Reporters immediately scrambled to the park, hoping for live interaction with a candidate who had mounted a remarkable comeback from seeming political death at the start of the year, with a sequence of primary victories in some 20 states in every region of the country: large states and small, on both coasts, in the north and south, and in the Midwestern heartland.

Throughout his long career—which stretches over 50 years, including two terms as Barack Obama's vice-president, seven

terms in the US Senate and two years as a county councilman before that—Biden has been famous, or rather notorious, for loose-lipped volubility. But not this time. After laying the wreath, he spoke only a few terse words. (“Never forget the sacrifices that these men and women made. Never, ever, forget.”) With his snowy-white hair, and dressed in a black suit with a black mask and black sunglasses, he looked like an aged hero in a Hollywood action film. Then he climbed back into his SUV and was driven home, there to resume the virtual campaign he has been waging via camera, screen and pre-recorded video.

“American exceptionalism, our supposed exemption from the furies of history, has ended with a vengeance”

“Nearly every morning,” *New York* magazine reported in mid-May, “Biden spins through an early Peloton ride in the upstairs weight room, dresses (formally, no sweatpants), drinks his breakfast shake, and sits at the phone in his study awaiting the latest updates on the world’s misery.”

This disciplined routine runs counter to Biden’s instincts and history. He is the most conventional of old-school American politicians—gabby, flesh-pressing—and the product of a distant time. Way back in 1972 in his first Senate campaign, energetic, cocksure and with a blinding smile, he challenged an established and much older Republican incumbent. The odds were steep but Biden never doubted he could do it, relying on his connection to voters. “He was sure he knew where the people stood,” Richard Ben Cramer wrote of the young Joe Biden in his classic study of the 1988 presidential campaign, *What it Takes*. “They were like him, he was like them... he’d be their voice... he’d stand up for them. Even if it meant picking a fight.”

Biden turned 30 after election day, barely making the constitution’s minimum age for the Senate. If he wins in November 2020 he will be the oldest man ever to be elected president and will take office at the age of 79, surpassing Trump, who turns 74 in July.

This battle of the geriatrics will unfold against entirely novel conditions as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, which—our dumb American luck—has come in an election year and upended everything.

For one thing, Biden’s sweep towards the nomination was interrupted mid-surge. He remains trapped in the technical limbo of “presumptive” rather than confirmed nominee because the schedule of later primaries was suspended, including in the key states of California and New York. His party also had to postpone its national nominating convention from mid-July to mid-August—assuming it will be held at all. If it

is, it will be nothing like the coronation of times past—nominee, running mate and party shown off to the nation—but in all probability will be spare, skeletal, perhaps cheerless, like the National Football League games we are told will be played in empty stadiums.

And after the nomination it could get even stranger—a “split-screen” campaign through the autumn, Biden and Trump debating in “feeds” from separate, secure locations. That’s assuming Trump doesn’t manage to avoid the debates somehow—he fears his challenger enough to have pressured the president of Ukraine to concoct an investigation of him, resulting in Trump’s own impeachment. Their vice-presidential candidates will also “meet” remotely, while surrogates rage at one another on Twitter and on rival cable TV networks.

Still worse is the growing sense that while the pandemic may be a meteor none could have foreseen, its arrival threw a searchlight on pathologies that have been festering beneath the surface for many years—gaping disparities in our healthcare system, inequalities in our social services, profound racial tensions and rotted fibres in our putatively strong economy.

Of course much of the globe is reeling from coronavirus, but the US has been hit far worse—far more infections and far more deaths—than any other country, any *two* other countries. With this comes the shocking feeling that “American exceptionalism,” our supposed exemption from the furies of history, has ended with a vengeance. God has stopped smiling on us.

Are there parallels? The jobless numbers of 40m in the space of 10 weeks—excluding uncounted workers in the gig economy—invite comparison with the Great Depression. The chair of the Federal Reserve, Jerome Powell, has said unemployment could reach 25 per cent—Depression levels. And many of those jobs may not come back.

One difference is that this time, here as in other countries, the shutdown was induced by the government. Before then, the economy seemed strong; Trump was counting on it to get him a second term. But the US economy had also looked strong in the days leading up to the Depression. In fact, then as now, deep cracks were visible to those who troubled to look—unregulated stock trading, dangerously low farm prices, assembly-line manufacturing that produced more goods than the public could afford. So, too, the pre-pandemic 21st-century economy was structurally weak; built on arcane financial-sector transactions, inflated real estate, and the yawning chasm between the rich and the rest, atop a rickety foundation of deregulation, privatisation and the outsourcing of critical manufacturing and supplies.

All this has been brought home in the most palpable way. American hospitals have had to pay extortionate prices for ventilators; the paper masks most of us wear are imported from China. Giant deposits of wealth—for instance, exorbitant commercial real estate in cities like New York—could all but disappear in the next months and years as people “telework” or flee to the countryside. Industries once worth billions—professional sports, ►



Hollywood films, research universities—are shuttered with no one able to say when they might re-open.

Meanwhile, the government's response has been toxic denial. At the outset, Trump and his allies in the media depicted the virus as a hoax being spread by his detractors. This still sometimes seems to be the president's view and much of his party's as well, even as the death toll rises. State and municipal administrators (such as New York's Democratic governor Andrew Cuomo) pleaded for assistance—money, equipment, respiratory masks—which Trump unaccountably refused to provide or to mobilise his government to manufacture. This truculence resulted in tens of thousands of deaths. Even after Trump's much-delayed and grudging acknowledgment of the facts—which he still avoids mentioning in public—the administration and its allies in Congress failed to meet the most pressing challenges. We lag far behind other countries in testing, yet the states are being pressured to reopen beaches, barbershops—and massage parlours. And for all Trump's vaunted promise to revive the stalled economy, he has taken only baby steps. While governments in Denmark, Germany, and the UK intervened to provide workers with a substantial portion of lost wages, a US administration beholden to the self-serving prejudices of wealthy campaign donors has made sure to enrich itself while letting the labour force struggle into destitution.

A \$2 trillion stimulus package was sold to the public as Trump's 21st-century version of Roosevelt's New Deal, but it actually replicates the blinkered and self-defeating business-first remedies of FDR's hapless predecessor, Herbert Hoover. Beyond the tax cuts and rebate that dominated the arithmetic, it reeked of antique, poorhouse-era almsgiving. A transfusion of cash to "small businesses" dispensed through private banks has been worse, exactly the boondoggle for well-capitalised companies that Trump's opponents warned about.

Hoover is remembered today as a cold-hearted incompetent. This is unfair. He was in reality a humane leader undone by his inflexible devotion to laissez-faire principles that history had discredited. Trump acknowledges no principle whatsoever, apart from the imperative—shared, it must be said, by his party and his perfervid base of supporters—of a second term.

This year's Memorial Day ceremonies inevitably had the undertone of a newer message of mourning, not least because the holiday came just ahead of a second moment that Americans had been anticipating with trainwreck fascination. This was the announcement, on Wednesday 27th May, that the American death toll had reached 100,000 (the actual total is almost certainly much higher). This is

When elected in 1972, Joe Biden was the youngest senator in the US; if he wins this November, he would be its oldest president. Left: protests in Boston over the death of George Floyd end in violence

more than the combined US deaths in every war since 1945—Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq; more deaths too, as Mehdi Hasan pointed out on *The Intercept*, than “ever died in a single year from HIV/Aids, drug overdoses, gun violence, or car crashes in the US... more than 33 times the number of people who died on 9/11.”

The pandemic toll has been especially high among the country’s minority populations, which include its 40m African Americans and 60m Latinos, who together make up almost a third of our population. These groups often work high-risk frontline healthcare jobs—as orderlies, nurses, emergency service workers—or in onsite workshops where infections spread most easily. They are disproportionately poor, and as such suffer the most from the porous medical safety net of a nation that declines to grant healthcare as a “right” and instead relies on pasted-together coverage linked to (now fast-vanishing) jobs. Many live and now die in solidly Republican “red” states—blacks in the Deep South, Latinos in Texas—which refuse to extend health coverage to the extent allowed for under Obamacare.

The stubborn race gap in American society leads naturally into the third, and perhaps the most crucial, event of the last week of May. On the night of Monday 25th, hours after Biden visited the veterans’ memorial, a white policeman in Minneapolis—one of the country’s prize cities—knelt on the neck of a handcuffed African-American, George Floyd, and would not let up, ignoring the man’s pleas (“I can’t breathe”) and those of onlookers. Instead the officer continued to press his knee against Floyd’s neck for almost nine full minutes and kept it there after he died. This killing was captured on video. The police officer, Derek Chauvin, and three others were fired. Chauvin was later arrested and charged with third-degree murder and manslaughter.

By then Minneapolis had erupted in riots—a police station was set ablaze—and sympathetic demonstrations by mostly young people broke out in cities across the country, more than a hundred in the space of a week. The protests became the first event to interrupt and displace the pandemic in the continuous TV and live-stream news cycles that consume even more hours than usual now that so many Americans are in lockdown. The disturbances they watched—which included the live, on-air arrest of a CNN reporter who was covering the scenes—recalled for many the street battles that brought America to the brink of civil war in the late 1960s.

This is the dangerously divided America that Biden and the Democrats will inherit if they win in November—a victory that would, for it to be meaningful, have to come with a substantial, filibuster-proof majority in the Senate.

At this point there is no evidence this will happen. Polls point towards a fairly tight race between Biden and Trump. Some still give Trump the edge in important battleground states—the ones Obama won twice but Hillary Clinton failed to carry in 2016. But other analysis shows Biden doing better than the Democrats did last time with crucial demographic constituencies, in particular the burgeoning elderly vote. And Trump certainly scores poorly on handling the pandemic.

Yet for the time being it is Trump who still holds the advantage—not because he commands a majority. He never has and hasn’t needed to. Hillary Clinton got three million more votes in 2016, but he won anyway, thanks to the antique apportionment of the electoral college, designed in 1789—along with other measures overcounting voters in the slave-holding south—to ensure outsize influence for smaller, less-populated states.

Obama’s victory was seized on as evidence that the Democrats were riding a deep demographic tide, which could carry things their way for many cycles to come. But the opposite appears to be happening, because of how that changing population is distributed. The most diverse states are also the most populous; progressive voters may be increasingly more numerous, but are also crowded together with less of a say than over-represented, smaller, rural populations. California has 40m inhabitants and two senators. Wyoming has 550,000 people—and two senators. “By 2040, 70 per cent of Americans will live in 15 of our 50 states, and 50 per cent will live in just eight states,” writes *Vox*’s Ezra Klein in his well-argued new book, *Why We’re Polarised*.

That’s half the problem. The other half is so-called “affective polarisation,” the idea that tribal loyalty to one side or the other in our bitter and continual culture war saturates everything we feel and think. In such a climate wearing a face mask—or rather, not wearing one—constitutes a forceful political statement. The much-bruited “message” of the Memorial Day observances was that Joe and Jill Biden wore masks, while Donald and Melania Trump did not.

“Loyal Democrats hope that those voters whose voice Biden vowed to be in 1972 will somehow swing it in 2020”

Biden’s promise—the reason he won the nomination—is that he can heal this breach. The calculation, and the original premise of his candidacy, was a bit of retrospective calculation done by Hillary Clinton. She would be president today, she has written, “if just 40,000 people across Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania had changed their minds.” She meant the “white working-class” voters who supported Obama in 2008 and often again in 2012, but who switched over to Trump in 2016.

This is the fateful strategy of refighting the last war, yet Democratic Party leaders—its elders and kingmakers, and mainstream journalists—firmly believe in it. Biden paid dearly for the perception, which he has done little to dispel, that he is out of touch with the new base of the Democratic Party—young, progressive, impassioned—and that he is rather the handpicked “electable” choice of its elites. And his weaknesses grew large, prohibitively so it seemed, when he was trounced by the genuinely radical promise of Bernie Sanders in early contests in Iowa, New Hampshire and Nevada.

But then, the most dependable Democratic bloc, African-Americans, came through for Biden in South Carolina and set him on his path to victory. His nomination is owed to those voters. The mess and fury of Trump’s reign, plus nostalgia for the dignified Obama-Biden years, was a help. Black voters well remember Biden’s deference and loyalty to America’s first black president. They remember, too, the suffering in Biden’s life—the death of his first wife and their infant daughter in a car accident shortly after his victory in 1972; the loss of his son, Beau, to brain cancer in 2015. Biden’s story is one of overwhelming loss and nakedly-exposed grief. Important, too, has been his long political history as a working-class tribune. Loyal Democrats whose single overriding concern was taking the White House back from Trump concluded that he might be able to reach the parts of ▶

the country that Clinton couldn't—and that those voters whose voice he was sure he could be in 1972 might swing it once again.

In that long-gone era it was a plausible argument. There were still many such Democrats, some of them Irish Catholics like Biden. As his website says, he was born in the “blue-collar city of Scranton in northeast Pennsylvania,” adding that Biden’s father “worked cleaning furnaces and as a used car salesman.” But among today’s ultra-diverse and often highly-educated Democratic activists, Biden is a rarity—to the right of the bulk of the metropolitan base. It didn’t help when Biden was snared in #MeToo assault allegations—albeit nothing like the allegations against Trump, and coming increasingly into question—but enough to sow doubt with younger voters. For such reasons, the strategist Stanley Greenberg, who helped devise Bill Clinton’s winning campaign in 1992, has urged Biden to make the progressive Elizabeth Warren his running mate. She is said to be high on his list of candidates, and has made it clear she wants the job. Biden has said his choice will be a woman in any case.

“The danger will come if the election follows a different path, whose trailblazer was Richard Nixon”

But such a bargain could hurt him with that magical 40,000, who voted for Trump last time and will now be suspicious of Biden’s courting of a Democratic left that disdains the very idea of Making America Great Again. And that suspicion could count for more than his talking like a blue-collar Democrat circa 1972, a vanished species, as Biden all too often seems to be. When he launched a campaign slogan of “No Malarkey” he was using an authentic word from his era. It just sounds false today when no one speaks that way or knows anyone else who does. Wavering working-class Trump voters will often be ageing, but not so aged as Biden himself. “Malarkey” will no more endear him to them than Hillary Clinton’s use of “okey dokey-artichoke” did.

In times of emergency, and this is one, American elections in the modern era have followed one of two paths. The route Biden has sensibly chosen is the one that works best for Democrats. It is modelled on the 1932 election, in which FDR blamed the Depression on Hoover and made it stick before he’d worked up a plan of his own beyond the ethos of “try something.” Such a campaign begins and ends with the economy. Biden is said to envision a vast post-pandemic economic programme “more ambitious than FDR’s.” Even before the crisis he had begun to adopt some of his party’s more progressive ideas—like Sanders’s “Medicare for All” and a higher minimum wage—and these seemed pitch-perfect when the pandemic came and exposed the vulnerability of the uninsured and showed how inadequate most people’s life’s savings are. This could be the opportunity for Biden to become once more the voice of “the people.”

The danger will come if the election follows the second path, whose trailblazer was Richard Nixon in 1968. In that assassination and riot-packed year, when radical young activists were also alienated by the Democratic party machine, Nixon honed a

politics of polarisation, of racial discord and bitter cultural enmity. Trump did the same when he announced his candidacy in 2015 and—amid the new protests and uprisings—he appears to be doing so even more lewdly this time.

Nixon’s version was so successful that in his 1972 re-election, as Biden was elected as a Democratic Senator in Delaware, the Republican president carried the state with 60 per cent of the vote and won 48 others in one of the biggest landslides in history.

The week that began with Biden’s wreath laying, moved on to statistical confirmation of the grim exceptionalism of America’s coronavirus death toll, and ended with Trump being reprimanded by Twitter for inciting violence (the tweet read, “when the looting starts, the shooting starts”)—and then covering in a bunker beneath the White House, while 45m Americans were under curfew. It is a week that moved the African-American political philosopher Cornel West to say to CNN that the nation was collectively “witnessing America as a failed social experiment.”

Within days, tear gas was used to clear a Washington DC crowd from a church near the White House so that the president could pose with a Bible, which as he held it for the cameras looked like a prop he’d been handed on the walk over. (“If he opened it instead of brandishing it, he could have learned something,” said Biden.) In a threatening conference call with governors and mayors, Trump told them if they did not “dominate” the streets with force, he would send in the US army—as Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy did some 60 years ago, only they did it to safeguard civil rights activists, not commit violence against them.

The question is who will pay for the failed experiment that West spoke about—Donald Trump, who was sworn into office promising an end to fictive “American carnage” and now presides over a real American mausoleum? Or Biden and the Democrats, who will likely be denounced by Trump’s campaign and its auxiliaries as sympathisers of the myriad “outlaws,” “criminals,” “Antifa terrorists” or, in a word more congenial to the president, “thugs”—no matter how many are citizens demonstrating peacefully to bring about changes in policing which a majority of the country agrees need to be made.

Trump has said before that he was looking to Nixon as his model. Nixon too talked about law and order, defended the police in their clashes with protestors and waged war on liberal elites, returning with hatred the contempt they showed towards him and his voters. And Nixon too faced impeachment proceedings.

Even before the new and raw racial conflagration on the streets, it was plain that the Covid-19 pandemic had changed American life by feasting on latent poisons that have erupted in the Trump years but were present long before. Trump himself is more symptom than cause. Do Joe Biden and the Democrats have “what it takes” to cleanse it? Does anyone in our post-pandemic age? The lessons of history are few, and they are not encouraging. 

Sam Tanenhaus is Prospect’s US Writer-at-Large

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Venezuela's two presidents

The world thought it was witnessing a revolution. But 18 months on, while there may be two presidents, only one of them has any power

STEPHEN GIBBS

Shortly after midnight on 18th January, one of the two men who claims to be the president of Venezuela snuck by foot across the little-patrolled border into Colombia. The crossing, most often used by migrants and smugglers, can be made in minutes. At the other side of the frontier, Colombian intelligence officials were waiting for Juan Guaidó. Greeting him formally as “*Señor Presidente*,” they escorted him on to a government plane for the short flight to Bogotá.

Guaidó, who is banned from travelling by the regime of Venezuela's other—de facto—president, Nicolas Maduro, was beginning a nine-country visit to the Americas and Europe. It was designed to cement his unusual status as head of state in the eyes of around 60 nations—yet not his own. The following day he was

given a televised red-carpet reception by Colombia's president Ivan Duque. Then he held talks with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who (not coincidentally) was in Bogotá attending a terrorism conference. Afterwards Guaidó flew overnight by private jet to London, where he held meetings with both foreign secretary Dominic Raab and Boris Johnson. In the following weeks, he went on to meet Angela Merkel, Emmanuel Macron, and Justin Trudeau, before ending his tour as a special guest at President Trump's State of the Union address in Washington.

He then returned to Venezuela, arriving on a commercial flight at the main international airport of Caracas. The Maduro government sent an angry rent-a-mob to scream insults and jostle him as he emerged from the airport terminal. His ID card was confiscated by a junior immigration official.

Outside Venezuela, Guaidó might be fêted as a head of state, but at home he is subject to the whims of a regime that is convinced that the contest over who rules Venezuela is over.

Office without power

A year and a half after Guaidó launched his bid to topple a regime that has driven a once-rich country to penury, Venezuela's alternative president finds himself caught somewhere between hope and reality. So too are the governments that support him. If ruling a country is about the levers you control, Maduro still has them all: the army, the judiciary, the electoral authority, even the flailing economy. Guaidó is left with a title, but little else.

The original plan was very different. Guaidó was supposed to be the head of a velvet revolution, a temporary “stalking horse” politician. He was meant to pave the way for Maduro's relatively dignified exit, by ensuring fair elections were held before Venezuela could be returned to some sort of normality. It may now seem like wishful thinking. But there were plenty of believers at the time.

It was in the middle of 2018 that the idea of forming a rival, internationally-backed government in Venezuela was first hatched. Despite presiding over one of the worst-ever slumps in the economic history of the world, Maduro had just won re-election.

He did, and does, have some real support—perhaps a fifth of Venezuelans, who are largely kept loyal by fond memories of the predecessor who anointed him, Hugo Chávez. But Maduro's victory was, on all the evidence, fixed. Several opposition leaders had been banned from participating; voters were given strong hints that if they voted against the government they might lose their food rationing cards; the electoral authority was blatantly biased; and rules on equal access to the media were ignored. In the middle of the steepest recession the country had ever seen, Maduro claimed to have coasted home with 67 per cent of the vote.

But his victory meant there would be no respite in the economic meltdown. That collapse had been initially triggered by the 2014 crash in the price of oil, Venezuela's only significant export. The underlying economy, riddled since Chávez's time with corruption and inefficiency (which had been largely obscured by the high price of oil) was barely functioning. By January 2019, as Maduro donned the Presidential sash once again at an inauguration ceremony boycotted by most western nations, millions of Venezuelans faced more years of not just penury, but hunger.

Confronted with economic collapse, Maduro chose to continue headlong with the interventionist and distributive policies of his popular mentor, simply ignoring the cold reality that there was no longer any largesse to splash around. He took the view that inflation, which in 2018 was heading for 10,000 per cent (it would eventually reach over two million per cent), was a phenomenon that could be defeated by legislation. But the price controls he imposed led to massive shortages, and eventually Soviet-style bread queues. An exodus began—by mid-2019 close to 10 per cent of the Venezuelan population had emigrated.

All of Venezuela's neighbours, most notably Colombia, feared the effect of mass migration on their own societies. President Trump was also beginning to take an interest, not least because of the concern of members of his golf club in Doral, Florida, an area where many Venezuelan expats live. At one point he had to be talked out of hot-headed plans to move in with force.

But rather than openly depose Maduro, the opposition initially hoped to sideline him. The idea was developed in 2018 during a series of lengthy videoconferences between some veteran anti-Chávismo politicians. The group's most prominent partic-

ipant was Leopoldo López. A popular, Harvard-educated, former Caracas mayor, he had been imprisoned and then placed under house arrest since 2014 on (largely bogus) charges of inciting violence. Despite his detention he was able to communicate with the other leaders including Julio Borges, an Oxford graduate, lawyer and politician who in 2018 had escaped the threat of jail to exile in Colombia.

Borges, a wily negotiator, led moves to reach out to western governments. He was assisted by Luis Almagro, a former Uruguayan foreign minister and longtime foe of Maduro who was serving as secretary general of the Organisation of American States. Almagro helped rally Latin American support behind the idea that something must be done, and found a ready audience in countries—including Colombia, Brazil and Argentina—where politics had recently shifted to the right.

And in the Trump administration there was a hunger to find a solution to the “Venezuela problem.” In 2017, López's wife, Lilian Tintori, a former reality TV star, had visited the White House, delivering a speech on the appalling human rights situation in Venezuela and reportedly impressing Trump during a brief photocall. So when, in late 2018, during a series of visits to the United States, Borges presented his scheme to wrong-foot the Maduro administration, he found a receptive audience. He not only won the backing of prominent politicians outside of government, primarily Florida Senator Marco Rubio, but also the then-national security adviser, John Bolton. Both of these men helped swing Trump behind the idea.

“Guaidó was supposed to be the head of a velvet revolution; the politician who would pave the way for Maduro's dignified exit”

The plan made use of a paragraph in the Venezuelan constitution which declared that in the event that the presidency was “vacant” (the opposition argued that included a scenario where a president was squatting in power after an illegal election), then the head of Venezuela's parliament, its national assembly, would take over. Since 2016 the parliament had been under opposition control, following what was widely viewed as the last fair election in Venezuela. That result had infuriated Maduro, who soon set up his own, alternative rubber-stamp parliament, the Constituent Assembly.

The accidental president

The rival, powerless National Assembly still continued to meet, and its leadership rotated between the four main opposition parties. In January 2019 it was the turn of *Voluntad Popular*, or VP, the more confrontational party of the group, founded by López, to head the assembly. López himself was out of the running to take the role, as he was under house arrest. The next in line in the VP's hierarchy, Freddy Guevara, was also unavailable: he was in hiding at the home of the Chilean ambassador in Caracas.

So the baton passed to what was effectively the third choice: Juan Guaidó, 36, an affable, garrulous, if slightly awkward ▶

junior member of parliament. He took over the Presidency of the assembly at the start of 2019, when few Venezuelans had ever heard of him. But, as one senior opposition leader quipped, “his anonymity at least meant nobody hated him.”

Guaidó was one of a generation of Venezuelan opposition politicians who cut their teeth during the 2007 protests against Chávez's efforts at constitutional reform, which began the process of concentrating power in the President's hands. His unremarkable background (his mother was a teacher, his father a pilot) made him stand out in an opposition leadership which was still dominated by the Caracas moneyed elite. A trained engineer, he is not a natural public speaker; he has a tendency to mumble his words and convolute thoughts. Maduro mocked him for his youthfulness: “he's just a kid,” he would say.

But in those early weeks of 2019, Guaidó successfully rallied long-depressed opposition spirits, by declaring that Maduro was a “usurper” and not a president. He began to organise open-air town-hall style meetings, and proposed a simple three-point plan: the end of the “usurpation,” transitional government, and free elections. Most mutinously, he openly called on the military to consider its position. By mid-January last year, his political meetings were drawing huge crowds, with onlookers, some draped in the Venezuelan flag, lining rooftops to catch a glimpse of the man they dared believe could be their saviour.

“Few Venezuelans had heard of Guaidó. But, as one senior opposition leader quipped, ‘his anonymity at least meant nobody hated him’”

On 23rd January 2019, the rebel politician escalated his challenge. Apparently encouraged by the chants of the massive audience during one anti-government demonstration in Caracas, he solemnly raised the palm of his right hand, making the gesture of a swearing-in. “Before Almighty God,” he said, “I swear to assume the power... as President of Venezuela.” Within minutes (indicating it knew in advance) the US issued a statement saying it recognised him as the country's legitimate leader. Maduro, said Washington, was from that moment onwards “the former President.”

European governments were caught unawares and had to hurriedly decide what to do. A senior European diplomat in Caracas told me that he sent a cable to his ministry that night cautioning that it was not clear whether Guaidó's bold declaration would work or not. But momentum built, and soon dozens of democracies followed the lead of the US by recognising him as president. Among them before long were not only the major economies of South America, but also almost all the member states of the EU, including the UK.

But toppling a regime that still retained a hard core of political support, and apparent control of the armed forces, was never going to be a formality. Phil Gunson, a Caracas-based senior analyst at the Crisis Group, recalled watching events unfold with dismay. “This whole business of recognising Guaidó as president flew in the face of modern diplomatic practice and was a very

unwise move,” he said. “It was predicated on the idea that there would be a swift victory. And, of course, if Maduro had fled and Guaidó was installed in the presidential palace everything would have worked out. But it didn't happen that way.”

What instead followed was a series of promises by Guaidó that change was imminent. In February, he launched an attempt to bring in humanitarian aid, mostly provided by the US, over Venezuela's borders with Colombia and Brazil. The idea was that hungry guards would wave the aid through, defying orders from their commander-in-chief, Maduro, and unleashing a mass rebellion. But the troops stayed loyal. None of the aid was let in. The incident was an early wake-up call that regime change was not going to be a pushover. One of the pretender's most-repeated slogans, “*Vamos bien*”—“we are doing well”—began to be whispered on the streets as a sardonic jibe against him. The doubts grew.

Palace plots

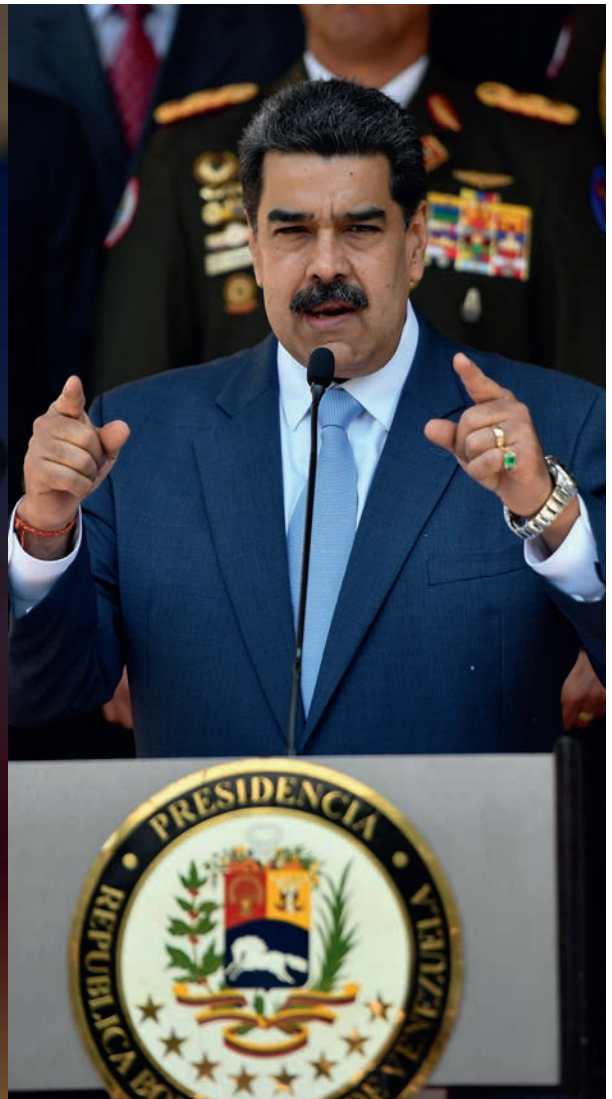
What almost no Guaidó supporters were aware of, however, was that there was a parallel threat to Maduro—from the inside. In early 2019, the head of the Venezuelan Intelligence Service, Manuel Cristopher Figuera—who has since defected to the US—was allegedly holding conversations with very senior members of the Maduro government about ousting the President.

The rebellion was provoked by fears that total economic collapse was imminent. It would have been announced with a declaration by the Supreme Court that the Guaidó-led National Assembly should, with immediate effect, be recognised as the legitimate representative of the Venezuelan people. That would be followed by simultaneous declarations by the armed forces and the presidential guard that their institutions would respect the decision. At that point, Maduro's security would be gravely compromised, giving him little option, it was hoped, but to flee into exile.

To this day, there are doubts as to how serious this plot was, and whether some of the players were bluffing. The principal source of our knowledge of the conspiracy is what Figuera has said in interviews—and he has, after all, sought safety in the US and had American sanctions dropped against him. Maduro himself says he was made aware of the plan in its early stages, and instructed his officials to infiltrate it. But the senior European diplomat in Caracas believes that mass defections were tantalisingly close, and that the episode left Maduro “really shocked.”

The original plan was to act on 1st May, the day the opposition had arranged a massive rally in Caracas. But fears that the regime might have cottoned on led to implementation being brought forward by a day. At dawn on 30th April, Guaidó and a few dozen rebel troops went to a bridge overlooking a military base in the (staunchly pro-opposition) east of the city, to try to provoke an uprising within the base. Hours earlier, with the assistance of Figuera, López had escaped his house arrest. On social media, Guaidó called for mass support on the streets.

Rumours swirled that a private jet was waiting at the Caracas international airport, ready to take Maduro into exile, probably in Cuba. From Washington, John Bolton, who had for weeks enjoyed publicly predicting the downfall of Venezuela's leftist leadership, began directing a series of pointed tweets at senior officials in the regime. “This is your last chance,” he wrote. “Remove Maduro, and we will take you off our sanctions list. Stay with Maduro, and go down with the ship.” The plea was not heeded, with all senior officials (other than Figuera) instead pledging their loyalty to the President. The “great uprising” in



“President” Guaidó (left) stages a press conference in Brussels on this year’s whirlwind global tour; while he’s away the regime of President Maduro (right) raids his offices

tatters, by early afternoon, the rebel national guardsmen sought safety. López sheltered with his family in the residence of the Spanish ambassador in Caracas, where he remains to this day.

The only participant who did not go into hiding was Guaidó himself. The regime has repeatedly threatened to imprison him but has, to date, refrained from doing so. It might be fearful of the cost of any international backlash, or, says Gunson of the Crisis Group, it perhaps prefers to watch the politician “drown in his own contradictions.” Instead, Maduro has taken action against those close to Guaidó. Following the failed uprising, parliamentary immunity was lifted from seven of his allies in the national assembly, including its vice president Edgar Zambrano, who was towed to prison after refusing to get out of his car. He remains in jail. Others are in exile.

Fantasy regime change

The failure of the 30th April plot led some of those allied to Guaidó to contemplate more desperate measures. In September, a team representing the man they still insisted on calling “President” met in Miami to consider a plan to capture Maduro. The group was

led by JJ Rendón, a Venezuelan political consultant who had gained a reputation as the “Mr Fix-it” among Latin American politicians. Rendón successfully masterminded the presidential election campaigns of liberal centrists including Juan Manuel Santos in Colombia and Enrique Peña Nieto in Mexico.

In a luxury high-rise apartment, they watched a PowerPoint presentation by a US special forces veteran, Jordan Goudreau. He proposed putting together an army of several hundred men, almost all Venezuelan military defectors, to seize Maduro, fly him out of the country, and install a government led by Guaidó. He said the cost would be an (oddly precise) \$212,900,000.

The Guaidó team was impressed by the pitch, seemingly not put off by clear warning signs that Goudreau could be a fantasist. The former soldier’s email address included the numbers “007,” while his website featured him in various improbable Action Man poses, jumping out of aircraft and running up mountains. Nevertheless, Rendón signed a contract with the shaven-headed ex-Green Beret, which—in faux legalese detail—set the terms of a bespoke regime change.

Goudreau has since claimed that Guaidó also signed the document. He has produced a page containing his ►

signature, and an audio recording where a man who sounds identical to the opposition leader, speaking broken English, appears to be agreeing to something, though exactly what is not clear.

Within weeks, Rendón said he began to mistrust Goudreau, who was allegedly demanding huge upfront payments and behaving “erratically.” The contract, the opposition claims, was terminated. But despite losing his client, Goudreau went ahead anyway, setting up training camps in Colombia and recruiting 60 or so mercenaries.

There was a further setback in the spring, when one of the plotters in Colombia, former Venezuelan general Clíver Alcalá, was indicted by the US for drug trafficking. The day before his voluntary extradition from Colombia to New York, he revealed details of the planned incursion, thus guaranteeing its failure. His motivation remains unclear, though it might have been a US-supported last-ditch effort to stop the mission going ahead by outing it. If so, it failed. Around 20 men, including two American former soldiers, set off for Venezuela, probably enticed by bounty money recently offered by Washington for the capture of several senior figures in the regime (\$15m for Maduro, \$10m for other leaders).

It was a disaster. Eight were killed when they attempted to reach the shore in a converted fishing boat, while the following day the two Americans and others were captured as their vessel drifted off a tourist beach. They have since been paraded on state television, as Maduro milks the farcical plot for all its propaganda worth.

The Trump administration has denied any “direct” involvement in the plan, though it must have been aware of it. “Guaidó is a US puppet, he would never get involved in that sort of thing alone,” speculates one formerly Caracas-based diplomat. Whatever the truth, the embarrassing episode left Guaidó appearing at best naive, and certainly weakened. Some senior figures in the opposition are now privately furious about his lack of judgment and beginning to wonder about his replacement.

Northern exposure

As for Maduro, his rule—albeit over the ruins of his country—appears more secure. “Those who thought that Maduro was going to be a short-term leader have repeatedly been disappointed,” Francisco Torrealba, the head of the socialist bloc in the National Assembly, and a personal friend of Maduro for over three decades, told me. He said the president’s training, as a bus driver and union leader, made him “understand Venezuelans,” in contrast to what he portrays as an aloof opposition leadership. Another politician who has worked closely with Maduro insists that the president’s television persona, which sometimes seems like the caricature of a comic-book dictator—with a Stalin moustache and apparently spur-of-the-moment legislation—is an act. The real Maduro he says, carefully advised by the Cuban government, is highly intelligent and “entirely ruthless.”

And, perhaps, lucky—the latest example of that being the coronavirus pandemic. The virus has provided the regime with the perfect excuse to impose a curfew on its citizens, reducing the risk of serious protests despite ongoing fuel shortages and collapsing public services. At the same time, Venezuela’s international isolation, and the very low number of incoming international flights, could just keep the disease in check—fortunate in a land where one third of its hospitals do not have reliable running water.

Venezuela is, to give one measure of the collapse, now a country where once relatively well-paid doctors and nurses earn

almost meaningless wages of less than £5 a month. Having overseen such ruin, Maduro is of course widely despised. And yet he clings on to a seemingly indestructible bedrock of support, mostly due to nostalgia for the way his predecessor managed, temporarily, to transform the lives of millions through social welfare programmes. These included free homes that were funded by the oil bonanza income that lubricated the Chavez years.

“Being your country’s alternative president is a miserable role when the actual president has all the power”

The elitist cast of the Caracas opposition also impedes its connection with Venezuela’s poor, and its American links look suspiciously unpatriotic to some voters. “The situation would be better if Chávez were here, he loved his people and gave his life for his country,” said Simon Morales, 70, a street vendor of bananas in Caracas. (Chávez died of cancer in 2013.) The opposition, he said, “just listens to the orders of the North [the US].”

That suspicion among those that still support the government, that Guaidó is an American imposition, has been helped by the opposition leader’s unapologetic support for every action the Trump administration takes. Although a recent survey suggested Venezuelans overwhelmingly oppose US sanctions, Guaidó has been a strong proponent of all of them, believing they offer political leverage.

But such leverage has abjectly failed to work, at least so far. Talks that took place last year between the government and the opposition went nowhere and are currently suspended. By this January, Maduro felt sufficiently strong to effectively confirm that he had no interest in reaching any accommodation. With the support of the national guard, a pro-government mob prevented Guaidó from entering his own national assembly, where he was due to be sworn in for another year as president. In surreal scenes, “President” Guaidó attempted, unsuccessfully, to scale the railings outside the parliament. Inside, another opposition MP, who is suspected of having been bought off by the regime, was declared the parliament’s new head.

Being your country’s alternative president—barred from your own office—is a miserable role when the actual president has the power and willingness to mercilessly cut you down to size. Several diplomatic sources in Caracas said Guaidó, without his closest allies, has recently seemed almost lonely, lingering late at evening meetings and receptions, “as if he has no home to go to,” said one. “He seems frustrated, worn down,” said another. “Yet he genuinely believes that the Maduro government cannot survive, and that eventually it will fall.”

But there will be a time limit on that prediction being fulfilled. The risk is growing that the man who once raised the hopes of millions of Venezuelans, and who even now is supported by most of the western world, will be remembered for a promise that failed, and for a presidency that in the end was make-believe. ■

Stephen Gibbs is the Times’ Latin America correspondent

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Arts & books

Mind the gender gap

Women still do the lion's share of raising children and cleaning the house. It's time for a proper equality revolution, argues *Emma Lundin*



The Home Stretch:
Why It's Time to
Come Clean About
Who Does the
Dishes

by Sally Howard
(Atlantic, £14.99)



**Double Lives: A
History of Working
Motherhood**

by Helen McCarthy
(Bloomsbury, £30)

**Equal amounts
practice and
shame:
Scot Tissue
advertisement in
Life magazine,
1950**

Traditional gender roles “pervade our homes like the aroma of cheap fabric softener,” Sally Howard writes in *The Home Stretch*. She and her partner Tim had entered into parenthood with “a genuine willingness to share domestic tasks equally,” yet less than three months after the baby arrived, the emotional and mental labour of keeping the family alive had fallen onto Howard’s “aching shoulders.” Her manifesto-memoir interrogates the learned behaviour that got them into this unwanted situation, and tells the story of what really happens when feminists have children.

It is certainly true that motherhood reveals many of the traps laid by the patriarchy, that shadowy formation of male interest designed to lay all dreary housework and childrearing responsibilities at the feet of women. To find yourself struggling with the burdens that we associate with 1950s housewives can be a brutal awakening for anyone who has spent years congratulating themselves for choosing a progressive partner. Howard sets out to investigate the sources of frustration: she visits academics and activists who have dedicated their lives to removing patriarchal shackles; she conducts a survey on housework; she shadows her cleaner on her visits to other clients; and she has many uncomfortable conversations with Tim that she generously shares with her readers.

The personal is political, but it is also very recognisable. When Howard investigates the tasks fathers tend to refuse because they are coded as feminine and therefore unmanly, I think of my friend who decided that he wouldn’t take his child to baby sensory classes when he was on parental leave because, he said, he just wouldn’t enjoy it. “We don’t go there for *my* sake,” his wife replied incredulously. I am also reminded of the way the health visitors at my local baby clinic laughed when a father struggled to dress his baby after the weigh-in—reinforcing the stereotype that men are a bit useless at this sort of thing. The truth is, of course, that we improve skills we exercise regularly: the only reason (some) women can dress babies is because they practise (or choose clothes without a gazillion poppers for visits to the health clinic).

Howard shows how women’s knack for multitasking—remembering birthdays, sending cards and keeping kids in correctly fitted shoes—is down to equal amounts of practice and shame. “I know there’s tea and biscuits in the cupboard in case the in-laws pop round, and that a birthday card and stamps have been bought for my partner’s cousin’s son,” Howard writes. “Because it’s me—not their blood relation—who will be judged.” Shame

is a core theme of her interview with Donna, a successful career woman whose husband refuses to do his bit to keep their household running. Donna doesn’t tell anyone about Dave’s failings as, she says, it is too embarrassing. Keeping up the appearance of clean, happy children in a healthy, equal marriage turns out to be—in itself—very gendered work.

**“Keeping up the
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Howard points out that the domestic gender gap hasn’t been solved by household gadgets, and that the trickle-down effect of second-wave feminism didn’t revolutionise our lives in the way its activists had hoped. But what does work? As part of her investigation, she goes to Sweden where she hangs out with Anders, a *lat-tepappa*—a man on parental leave (the nickname stems from the assumption that all they do all day is drink coffee). Anders is frustrated by the way Sweden is often wrongly portrayed as a gender-equal utopia, but it’s clear to Howard that shared parental leave, and paternity leave in particular, really are game changers for families. I agree: having parented in the UK for three years, I moved to Sweden nine months ago. I’m now so used to seeing fathers looking after children on their own during the day that I hardly notice it. They often outnumber mothers at playgrounds—possibly because paternity leave tends to happen during the second half of the 480-day statutory parental leave, of which only 90 days are reserved for each parent and can’t be transferred to the other—when children are mobile and entertained by sand and swings. Most of these fathers seem to be able to find matching shoes for their kids’ feet.

Swedish parenting isn’t gender equal by default: changing behaviour is a challenge. It has taken over five decades of hard work from mostly female politicians (37 per cent of the MPs elected to the Swedish parliament in 1988 were women, compared to just 34 per cent of the MPs elected to the House of Commons last year) for Swedes to be ►



LEWIS, GEORGE P. (PHOTOGRAPHER) / PUBLIC DOMAIN

given some tools with which they can at least attempt to balance their home and work lives.

Throughout *The Home Stretch*, Howard attempts to acknowledge the multiple layers of oppression that some women face on account of their gender, class and race. But despite railing against liberal feminism—whose response to women's double work in employment and the home has been to open “the servants’ entrance”—this is a book written for the middle classes: those who can afford to employ cleaners and who need to interrogate whether they can justify doing so. Howard’s solution? Pay them what *you* earn during the time they spend in your house—it’s skilled work and the minimum wage is not enough.

Her attempt to write both a memoir and research-driven investigation leaves a scattered impression with a few loose ends. Howard’s book is a good introduction to a vast field of research, but the survey she conducts ought to have been given more space, and a deeper interrogation of the second-hand information thrown up in interviews would be advisable. Most of all, I would have liked Jurate, Howard’s Lithuanian cleaner, to write her own book. Why must working-class women be ventriloquised by those more privileged?

Helen McCarthy’s *Double Lives: A History of Working Motherhood* is a thoroughly researched monograph that leaves no stone unturned in the quest to understand how mothers in the workforce have been portrayed since the Industrial Revolution formalised their labour. It is also, perhaps surprisingly, a riveting read filled with the sounds, textures and

emotions of the past. While we are often told that women of previous generations were silent, here you can hear their voices—exhausted and defiant. Among them are Ellen Grounds, a pit-brow worker in the 1870s whose mother looks after her two-year-old son while she is at work; Felice MacDonald, who takes her three children to three separate childminders (none would take them all) in order to go to work during the Second World War; and Harbhanan, an East African Indian immigrant who works in Marks & Spencer in the 1970s, while her mother-in-law looks after her children.

“I would have liked Jurate, Howard’s Lithuanian cleaner, to write a book”

In reconstructing this forgotten past, McCarthy exposes the misconception that working mothers—or childcare—are modern phenomena. Four million women and girls were in paid work in late Victorian Britain, McCarthy points out, and there tended to be less, rather than more, female employment as the decades wore on. Indeed, the “stay-at-home” housewife we think of as traditional was in truth the product of a historically-specific era, between live-in servants becoming unaffordable and domestic appliances affordable. While the Second World War did draw women into new roles, rapid wage

**Working women:
a rubber factory
in Lancashire,
September 1918**

growth in the mid-20th century made it easier for families to get by on a father's earnings alone, which many at least attempted. But even in the mid-1950s, the social researcher Pearl Jephcott moved to working-class Bermondsey in south London, and found that a lot of married women there had always worked—in factories or as cleaners. It was more financially privileged women who were the typical housewives, supposedly freed from paid drudgery by their husband's earnings, but also constrained by the male fantasy of an angel in the house and their lack of financial and psychological independence. Many of these women believed that they had to choose between children and work, particularly if it was of the intellectual kind.

Among them were Beatrice Webb, the socialist reformer born in 1858, who was convinced that she was too old to combine the two after she married at the age of 34 and decided not to have children. It seemed like an easy choice but, McCarthy writes, “the decision against maternity haunted Beatrice in her darker moments, when she conjured up idealised images of an alternative maternal self.”

Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, a pioneer as a female doctor, suffragist and campaigner for women's health, had both children and a career, though she was reluctant to make a thing out of it. Nevertheless, in May 1874—when she was the mother of a 10-month-old and pregnant again—she found time to rebuke Henry Maudsley's “evidence” of female intellectual inferiority based on their biology. Her circumstances must have made her intervention a personal crusade, McCarthy argues.

Wherever women found themselves on the social scale, the labour market they joined was organised to support male breadwinners who, in turn, were meant to support their families. In the late 19th century, though very many women were employed, women at work were blamed for men's idleness, infant mortality and the degradation of the “British race.” Women were considered so important to the turn-of-the-century eugenic project, which sought to create a healthier population through the manipulation of supposedly hereditary traits, there were calls to ban them from dangerous workplaces—even when those workplaces were the only source of income for their families.

In the interwar years, married women remained invisible in unemployment statistics, despite their vital contributions to their families' economy. The Jarrow crusade was about dispossessed men, McCarthy argues, but she leaves out that the march was led by their MP, Ellen Wilkinson, the 10th woman ever elected to parliament. Even the new welfare state (which Wilkinson had a hand in creating) treated women as financial appendages to their husbands: hence their reduced National Insurance contributions and pensions for married women, as well as gender-specific widow's allowances. In many professions a “marriage bar”—meaning women had to quit after their wedding—persisted in social practice rather than law, even after it was gradually lifted in the decades following the Second World War.

Eventually a new model of working motherhood did emerge. Full male employment in the 1950s and 60s might have forced employers to adopt a (somewhat) more open mind to female hires, and years of rapid economic growth and social change opened minds more widely about the roles married women could play. A burgeoning of consumer goods, like TVs and toys, created a new aspiration for extra income that could be justified as being an investment in the family, while others—like washing machines—

freed up the time in which earning was possible. Initially, the marketing of all this, which was often aimed at women, had to appeal to their self-image as respectable housewives. The company Tupperware, McCarthy writes, understood its target audience perfectly and managed to portray the selling of plastic containers to one's friends as pleasurable part-time work that could fulfil social and material aspirations.

But in these years, a woman was still supposed to make sure that her children were old enough before she sought employment: psychologist John Bowlby's recommendation that a mother should be constantly available to a child during his or her first three years of life had great impact on British ideas of parenting. In a country where parental leave pay was low or non-existent, the combination of these two competing ideals left many women with unfulfilled ambitions either as parents or independent wage-earners. The “you-can't-have-it-all” syndrome dawned.

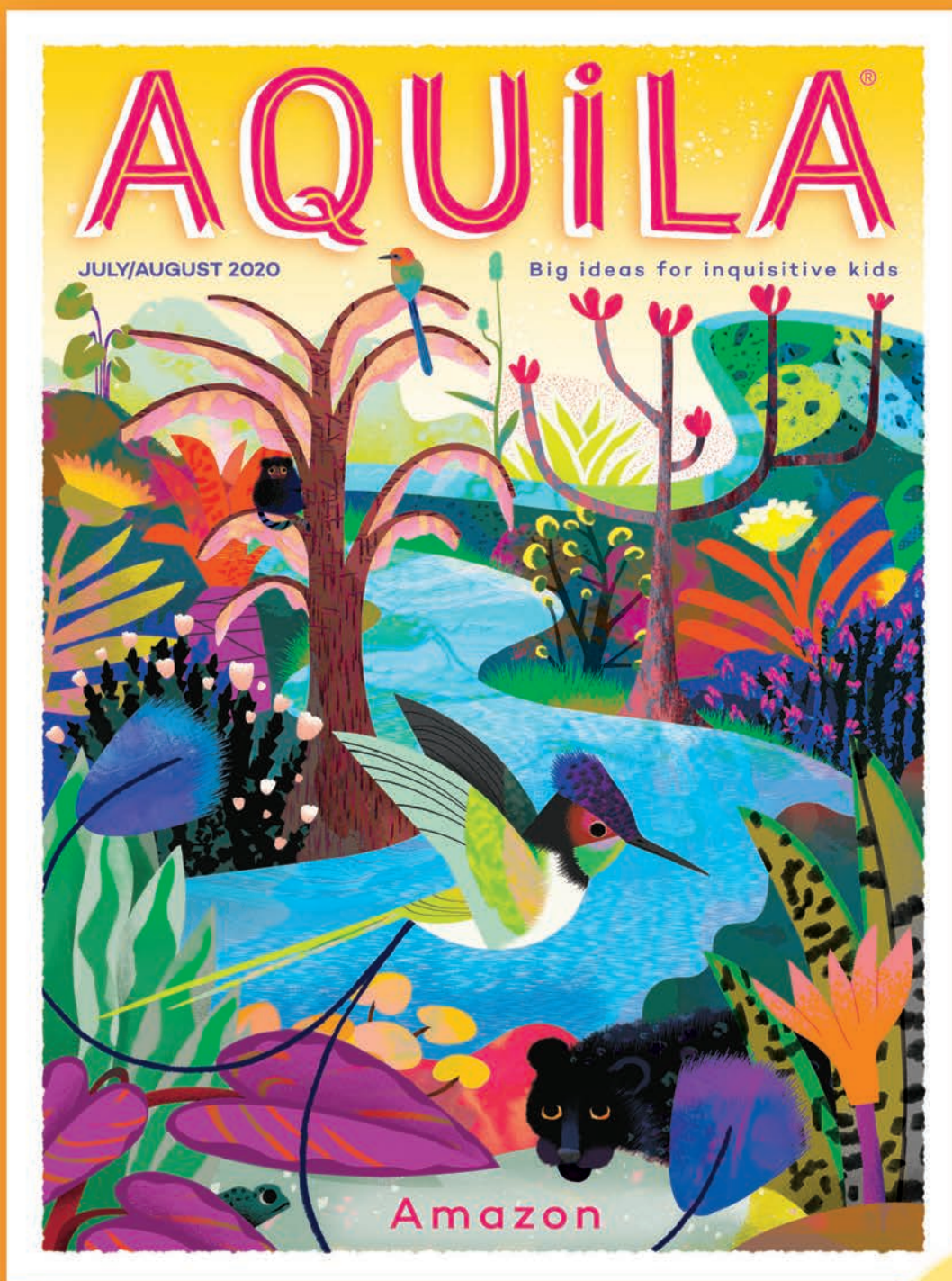
“The housewife emerged after live-in servants became unaffordable but before domestic appliances became affordable”

This is a British history of motherhood and it is also a mostly white history of motherhood, bar one chapter titled “Newcomers.” Among McCarthy's sources here are Z Nia Reynolds' collection of accounts from Caribbean migrants, Kennetta Hammond Perry's interrogation of black Britons' experiences, Louise Ryan's work on Irish women's migration and Buchi Emecheta's 1974 novel *Second-Class Citizen*. Ideally, these women's voices would have been interspersed throughout the book. Still, McCarthy clearly depicts how white women policed race in the workplace, and—immersed as they were in the attachment theory ideal—frowned on women from the Caribbean who left some of their children behind to search for a better life in the colonial metropole.

Howard and McCarthy agree that paid work hasn't been the path to liberation for all women, and that a shift in values over recent decades hasn't translated into an equal and fair workplace. Ideas about the caregiving nature of women and the inability of men to look after anyone or anything still conspire to keep us in tightly prescribed roles. Yet some real change has taken place: McCarthy notes that unlike in the mid-20th century, there was no talk of rationing women's work to secure full male employment after the 2008 financial crisis. And Howard's home life was dramatically improved when her partner took eight months of parental leave with their toddler, forcing him to cope with raising the child and Howard to let go of her “comforting delusions around the primacy of motherhood.” Both these books show that the lives of women who become mothers have changed many times and dramatically over the past 150 years; let's hope that we can close the remaining gender gap—in the workplace and at home—within the next 15.

Emma Lundin is a historian and journalist based in Malmö and London

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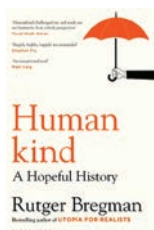
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Notice the kittens

There is compelling evidence in favour of humanity's better nature, but a historian's breathless enthusiasm doesn't convince *Julian Baggini*



Humankind: A Hopeful History
by Rutger Bregman,
translated by
Elizabeth Manton
and Erica Moore
(Bloomsbury, £20)

If you want to be seen as a profound thinker, just remember the principle: dark is deep. You must take a dim view of human nature and see its prospects as dismal. There may be more money to be made writing upbeat self-help books promising easy happiness, but you will never be taken seriously in self-consciously intellectual circles unless you are unremittingly gloomy or, as such intellectuals see it, unflinchingly realistic.

Think of the fate of Steven Pinker. Once widely admired as one of the world's leading psychologists, he is now ridiculed by cognoscenti for his belief that we've "never had it so good"—that more human progress remains possible, even likely. Meanwhile, the stature of the likes of Nassim Nicholas Taleb and John Gray, neither of whom I believe has ever been photographed smiling, grows every time they dismiss his data as either wrong or irrelevant.

The Dutch historian Rutger Bregman has emerged as the youthful leader of the rebellion against the doomsters and gloomsters. His first book, *Utopia for Realists*, argued that with a universal basic income, a 15-hour working week and open borders, we could build a fair and flourishing world. It was a huge bestseller, praised by the likes of the Green MP Caroline Lucas, who said it "adds to a growing list of compelling accounts in favour of radically restructuring our economy." But the sober mainstream was unmoved: journalist Will Hutton dismissed his three key proposals as "pie in the sky."

The sequel, *Humankind*, is an attempt to challenge the basic premise on which the more pessimistic orthodoxy rests: that human nature is essentially rotten to the core and that only the constraints of civilised society keep us in check. "Veneer theory," as the Dutch primatologist Frans de Waal calls it, asserts that underneath the pacific and pro-social cover of civilisation lies humankind's festering heart of darkness.

Bregman's tone is chirpy, but he does not attempt to make the impossible case that the human heart is all sweetness and light. His view is simply that we have a "powerful preference for our good side," one that is hard to override. We may not be wholly good, but we are mostly good.

His takedown of veneer theory is compelling. Meticulously sifting the evidence, he finds that the most pessimistic views of human nature are not backed up by the facts. Indeed, some are solely backed by fiction. William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies* is routinely cited as if it somehow proved that if left to themselves children would inevitably descend into barbarism. Oddly, people rarely talk about the only historical example of a similar case. In 1965, six boys from a boarding school in Tonga were shipwrecked for 15 months on an island, 'Ata, now classified as uninhabitable. They ended up co-operating, innovating and improvising—and they survived in good physical and psychological shape.

Numerous other myths of essential human depravity are ruthlessly dismantled. If you think war unleashes the

inner murderer in ordinary men, consider the growing weight of evidence that it is hard to make soldiers kill, and that most of them don't even try. One study by the sociologist Randall Collins found that in modern warfare only 13 to 18 per cent of soldiers in combat fired at all. The military has good reason to keep such truths quiet and foster instead the myth of the fearless warrior. The 1914 Christmas truces along the western front so disturbed the generals that they went to great efforts to make sure they weren't repeated.

Then there is the oft-repeated story of Kitty Genovese, a New Yorker murdered in 1964 on the stairs of her own apartment building. The legend is that 38 witnesses stood by and did nothing, even as the assailant returned twice to inflict more wounds. This became the classic illustration of the bystander effect, the tendency to walk by on the other side, especially when others are doing the same.

The problem is the true story of that murder: most of the neighbours didn't hear or see anything, and several had in fact called the police, who did nothing. One drunk neighbour notoriously did not intervene, but he had an understandable reason: he was a gay man afraid of drawing the attention of the police at a time when homosexuality was illegal. Yet he did notify a neighbour who bravely went to the stairwell to try to help. Genovese died in her arms.

"Six boys were shipwrecked on an island. They ended up co-operating, innovating and improvising"

This one misreported anecdote and several dodgy lab experiments turned the bystander effect into a widely accepted fact of human behaviour rather than a dubious hypothesis. When a Danish psychologist, Marie Lindgaard, looked at CCTV footage of crimes to see how people actually behaved in real-life conditions, she found that in 90 per cent of cases including brawls, rapes and attempted murders, someone intervened to help.

Bregman is especially convincing in debunking two of the most notorious social psychology experiments of the 20th century. Philip Zimbardo's Stanford Prison Experiment is still widely taken to show that if you give an ordinary person a uniform and authority, they will become a tyrannical monster. Stanley Milgram's obedience experiments similarly concluded that all it takes is an authority figure in a white coat with a clipboard and people will be ready to inflict potentially lethal electric shocks on their fellow human beings. ▶

Bregman is not the first to discredit either experiment—*Prospect* ran a piece unraveling both in April last year—but his summary of their failings is damning. In the Stanford Prison Experiment, the subjects playing the role of guards were not left to their own devices but instead strongly coerced into behaving badly. And even then, the original study papers show that two thirds of them in fact “refused to take part in sadistic games.” When the BBC tried to re-run the experiment for a 2002 reality show, this time without any pressure applied, the result was an outbreak of harmony. By day seven, the group had voted in favour of creating a commune. In Milgram’s study, what is striking is how much subjects resisted obeying orders. And there is good evidence that many subjects simply did not believe that they were causing harm, (rightly) assuming that they were involved in some kind of simulation. It would indeed have been incredible if one of the US’s leading universities was actually torturing people.

And yet despite these and other well-documented rebuttals, Bregman writes, “veneer theory is a zombie that just keeps coming back,” often in the guise of whataboutery. What about Auschwitz? What about the Rwandan genocide? What about countless other examples of human depravity?

Of course Bregman has to concede that we too often descend into barbarism. But the reasons he gives come with silver linings. For example, while he accepts that *some* of Milgram’s subjects clearly did act with intentional cruelty, their chief reason for doing so was not sadism but the desire to help. Subjects reported that they hated what they were being asked to do but believed it would benefit science, and thereby eventually help create a better world. The moral of this story is that if you want to make people do evil, don’t appeal to their worst natures—just hijack their better ones. Time and again wrongdoers follow the same justificatory path as Adolf Eichmann, a leading architect of the Holocaust, who “did evil because he believed he was doing good.”

“Bregman’s book is an attempt to challenge the basic premise on which the more pessimistic orthodoxy rests: that human nature is essentially rotten to the core”

The other generally benign mechanism that can be abused is our capacity for empathy and fellow-feeling. Studies of soldiers suggest that they are not primarily motivated by ideology or nationalism, but by friendship and solidarity with their comrades-in-arms. Just as parents often say they wouldn’t hesitate to kill to protect their babies, soldiers kill primarily to protect each other.

But Bregman does have to concede that these silver linings are attached to some pretty dark clouds. “It seems we’re born with a button for tribalism in our brains,” he says. “Empathy and xenophobia” are “two sides of the same coin.” His concession that the good and the bad are deeply connected jars with the headline message that “most people, deep down, are pretty decent.” Isn’t it rather the case that, deep down, we’re amoral? We have instincts for co-operation and fellow feeling, not because we’re good but because we have evolved to find these things useful. The fact that these instincts can be harnessed for good and evil suggests to me that there is nothing inherently good or bad about them.

Despite Bregman’s occasional willingness to acknowledge our darker side, his is not a balanced appraisal. Instead he offers a piece of advocacy for our better natures that reads like a 400-page TED



© AP/SHUTTERSTOCK

talk, driven by stories, full of inspirational moments and punctuated by one-sentence paragraphs. It’s brisk and entertaining, but we are swept along too quickly. Although there is no reason to doubt the evidence he presents, it is not selected or framed impartially. Some of his villains, such as Richard Dawkins and Machiavelli, appear in caricature form, while the ideas of thinkers such as Hume and William James are somewhat distorted.

The strongest indication of imbalance is in the contrast between his strongly evidenced debunking of the pessimists, and his much more anecdotal case for the optimists. Bregman is on reasonably solid ground when he advocates for the humane Norwegian prison system and for citizens’ assemblies, both of which have been widely studied. But much less so when—on the strength of tales about an inspirational head of a Dutch healthcare company—he gushes about revolutionary management. Jos de Blok’s ideas are, supposedly, “on par with cracking DNA.”

So what are they? His company is based on the principle that staff should be driven by intrinsic motivations and do a good job for a positive social purpose, not extrinsic financial ones. It sounds wonderful (if not entirely novel), but it is just an anecdote. Is the secret of de Blok’s success really the managerial attitude that Bregman notes, or could other factors be more important? His brief mention that the company’s “overheads are negligible” due to its lack of an expensive head office suggests there is more to this story than progressive leadership. Similarly, his visit to an equally inspirational alternative Dutch school, Agora in Roermond, makes it sound idyllic, with students drawing up individual plans with “coaches” rather than teachers. But one brief, breezy eulogising chapter does not add up to an argument that the model is replicable, much as I’d like to believe that it is.

Despite its excesses and its breathless enthusiasm, the book works as a much-needed corrective to excessive pessimism about human wickedness. But why is such a corrective needed? Why are we so well-disposed to the view that we are not generally well-disposed?

Bregman argues that “to believe in our own sinful nature is comforting... it provides a kind of absolution.” If that’s just how people are, there’s no point feeling guilty over our own failings or getting too bothered by those of others. He also highlights two important

psychological mechanisms at work. One is negativity bias. We are more alert to the bad than to the good, presumably for evolutionary reasons. For survival purposes, we need to be much more attuned to potential threats than to what is harmless. The cost of failing to notice a lion is much higher than the benefits of noticing a kitten. Thanks to the omnipresence of news, we're also affected by availability bias. We pay more attention to what we see most and the news is filled with tragedies. This theory seems intuitively plausible, but given that intellectual pessimism long predates 24-hour news, it can only be an intensifier rather than a cause of our fundamental distortion.

Bregman argues that we need to counter our gloomier tendencies because "our grim view of humanity" is a "nocebo." Just as placebos have positive effects simply because people believe they do, nocebos are negative expectations of treatment or prognosis that become self-fulfilling prophecies. One nice piece of evidence for this are the studies that show the longer students study economics, which teaches them that human behaviour is motivated by self-interest, the more selfish they become. A society in which people assume the worst about human beings will be one that has coercive penal systems, authoritarian schools and low levels of trust, all things that will make matters worse.

Bregman clearly thinks that the flip side of this is that belief in human goodness can act as a placebo. If he's right about that, it hardly matters if many of his claims are factually true: believing them will make them so. He doesn't

undersell the extent to which positive beliefs can lead to positive actions. "Kindness is catching," he says. "And it's so contagious that it even infects people who merely see it from afar."

But his evidence is again anecdotal. If kindness truly did have an R value of above one, the world would be full of loveliness and his book wouldn't be needed. In his cries for the potential snowballing effects of good deeds we can hear the echoes of so many empty hopes of the past. People sincerely believed that the 1967 Summer of Love was going to usher in a new Age of Aquarius. Soon after Live Aid in 1985, an article by Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques in *Marxism Today* claimed that "A new politics sweeps the land" and that "the ideology of selfishness... has been dealt a further, severe blow." Right now people are quick to predict that the new sense of community fostered by the Covid-19 lockdown will change society for the better, forever.

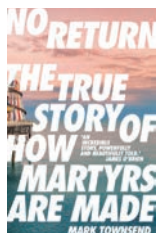
The world is never as grim as some fear or as sunny as others hope. The debate about whether human nature is essentially good or bad is pointless. The answer is that it is neither. We have the capacities for love, kindness and sympathy and also for hatred, malice and selfishness. To ask which set of characteristics comprises our essence is like asking whether a Manhattan is actually whiskey or vermouth.

Julian Baggini (microphilosophy.net) is the author of "How the World Thinks" (*Granta*) and "Babette's Feast" (*BFI Film Classics*)

Did he do evil because he believed he was doing good? Adolf Eichmann at his trial in Jerusalem in 1962

Difficult questions

Tackling radicalisation requires more than simple formulas, says Azadeh Moaveni



No Return: The True Story of How Martyrs are Made by Mark Townsend (*Guardian/Faber*, £12.99)

Mark Townsend's gritty and fast-paced book tracks three brothers from Brighton who left Britain to fight in Syria's jihadist rebellion. It is also a portrait of an immigrant family's decline with pointillist descriptions of racial hatred, gang violence and police malfeasance. Aided by leaked government documents and interviews with family members, including one of the brothers, Townsend, a journalist at the *Observer*, follows the brothers' transformation from bullied Muslim boys to members of a drugs gang to jihadist fighters darting round the mountains of northern Syria. What propelled them? And what, if anything, does their journey have to tell us about Britain?

The Deghayes hailed originally from Libya. The father, Abubaker, fled the brutal rule of Muammar Gaddafi in the mid-1980s. He was descended from a politically engaged family: his father, a trade unionist, headed the secular Baathist opposition to the Gaddafi dictatorship and died in prison. After receiving asylum, Abubaker married a cousin, and the couple settled in Saltdean, a coastal village outside Brighton. They raised their five boys in a country where they believed, as Townsend writes, that "the rule of law was observed."

Their illusions were soon shattered. The Deghayes experienced "sustained abuse," documented by various social services. For the five brothers, taunted as

"Pakis" and "terrorists" and pelted with food and water at school, walking home was like entering "a war zone." Mobs sent bricks through their windows. The "police were useless," even when far-right groups published the family's address on Facebook. A neo-Nazi established a local chapter expressly to "hound the family" and white supremacists marched through the village in Ku Klux Klan robes. During bad stretches, the family called the police as often as three times a week. Despite all this, in 2009, the year the abuse peaked, Sussex police was the only force in the country that did not register a single incident of religious abuse with the Home Office.

The pretext for persecuting the Deghayes was the public vilification in Brighton of Abubaker's brother. Omar Deghayes had been sold to the US military in Pakistan in 2002 on false pretences and dispatched to Guantanamo Bay, where he was tortured as an al-Qaeda suspect. After almost six years, the Americans abruptly released him back to the UK without explanation or apology. He was now blind in one eye. In the minds of his impressionable nephews, a continuous line was drawn between British foreign policy in Libya, abuses in the war on terror, racism at home and the failures of the Sussex police.

In early 2011, the family fled Saltdean and moved into a council flat in Brighton. It was here, amid a collapsing ceiling and leaking sewage pipes, that their parents divorced and the boys slouched towards adolescent ▶

delinquency, transforming “from bullied children to ringleaders.” They began fighting, shoplifting and building hefty criminal profiles. They were banned from most of the city and its bus network. A social worker noted ominously that it appeared the boys had been “rejected by society.”

By 2012, the brothers were dividing their time between drug-dealing, working out at the mosque gym, and watching the horror show emerging from Syria’s civil war. They were also creative. They wrote film scripts, rap songs and anti-racism videos, and produced a play that toured the south coast and Kingston’s Rose Theatre. But trapped in their endless battles with the authorities, they did not find a reliable outlet for their work. Increasingly certain that life in Britain would offer no meaningful pathways to employment or even basic dignity, the boys were even banned from entering a Morrison’s supermarket. In late 2013, Amer, the eldest brother, decided to travel to Syria, to fight for Islamist rebels against the Assad government. He made the trip with his father on an aid convoy, but then deserted. Two of his younger brothers, Abdullah and Jaffar, followed shortly after.

“The language of ‘jihadi brides’ has entrenched so many assumptions about the motives of the British citizens who travel to Syria—to say nothing of the agency of those trafficked”

At this point, Townsend’s account begins to lose focus. His reverence for terms like “jihad” and “martyrdom” casts decisions wrapped in politics, racism and intergenerational trauma as driven mostly by religious belief. The boys are never called militants—only jihadists and aspiring martyrs. This is of course more evocative. But to trap yourself within the linguistic register of teenage recruits and the propagandists who seek to mobilise them does not deepen our understanding. At moments, Townsend casts the decision to go to “fight Assad” sympathetically—akin to taking up arms against the Fascists in the Spanish Civil War—but these moments lack crucial context. It seems important for the reader to know, for example, that the brothers joined a group that was participating in sectarian massacres.

No Return also unquestioningly accepts the British state’s concept of “radicalisation,” which understands an individual’s embrace of political violence as a clinically observable process, based on a set of factors that span everything from mental health to political, cultural and religious beliefs. The narrative of *No Return* takes us down the conveyor belt of radicalisation theory: dark changes occur in the minds of the brothers when they watch the requisite videos of the American militant cleric Anwar al-Awlaki; then they start bewitching their fellow Brighton gang members until suddenly they are all “radicalised”—and primed to fight in Syria.

The point of the formulaic radicalisation story—in theory—is that it gives a host of public sector workers, from counter-terrorism officials in the Home Office and Special Branch all the way down to GPs, schools, social workers and police, a rubric to follow. Along the way, these institutions mop up intelligence about people who might pose a violent threat to the country, with the formal aim of protecting both the state and crucially the individual from harm. But if the promised safeguarding supports—such as secure housing and job support—don’t materialise, then all we’re left with is a snoop-

ing and intelligence operation and deradicalisation programmes come to seem like a ruse. By detailing the wide-ranging security oversight of the Deghayes family, together with the state’s lack of positive intervention, Townsend demonstrates that the government didn’t believe (or at least didn’t act on) half of its own theory, the half which holds that radicalisation can be reversed if the individual is cushioned with enough support and taught better ideas. He doesn’t draw this conclusion himself, even though it is where his own evidence points. He acknowledges that “hardly any teenagers in the country had more contact with the police” than the Deghayes brothers, which was surely the result of tip-offs being passed about, but then proceeds to repeat the dubious government claims that state bodies often choose “not to share intelligence with another.”

Further discrepancies and gaps go unremarked. Townsend speaks to a youth worker called Hanif Qadir who is meant to be “deradicalising” a girl called Rachel in the Deghayes’ gang who had converted to Islam. Rachel speaks openly about wanting to travel to Syria; she received £1,000 in her account from a Syrian bank. Qadir worked closely with the Home Office and counter-terrorism police, a direct conduit of the sort of information that was purportedly being siloed. The Home Office “pulled the plug” on the youth worker’s contract, writes Townsend, because “there was no room in the government’s austerity strategy for bespoke counter-radicalisation services.” That is nonsense. Nearly all state “deradicalisation” interventions are by nature bespoke. Whether they are effectively run is a different question. (Nabeelah Jaffer wrote about Qadir and his Active Change Foundation for *Prospect* in 2018.)

The authorities’ handling of the Deghayes’ case matched their subsequent conduct with the three Bethnal Green girls who journeyed to Syria in 2015. In each, local police and counter-terrorism security identified and tightly observed a cohort of young people known to be interacting with militant recruiters, sharing radical online content and discussing travel plans; in both cases, at least one member of the group had already travelled to Syria. But the authorities failed to tell the Bethnal Green girls’ parents that one of their daughters’ friends had absconded to Syria; and one of the Deghayes brothers managed to travel while on a watchlist and another on someone else’s passport.

Was all this incompetence or something more calculated? By letting the Bethnal Green girls and the Brighton brothers go to Syria, the authorities secured a stream of traceable phone and WhatsApp communications at the heart of various militant operations from a jihadist group affiliated with al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. These contacts allowed them to track the arrival of other foreign fighters. Townsend documents, as I observed in my own reporting, how police would then regularly confiscate laptops and phones that families and friends used to contact their relatives in Syria. None of this sounds like bungling. It sounds more like cynicism.

Throughout, Townsend is politely exasperated with the state’s counter-terrorism programmes, but he stops short of arguing they are inherently flawed; nor does he offer a true alternative. Like many liberal-minded experts, he sees a need for them—the Home Office must patrol for homegrown terrorism, or activities that might be adjacent to it—and mostly concludes the policies are fine, just shoddily implemented.

But what if the Home Office used the intelligence tools at its disposal to track violent threats without running a programme like Prevent, which has expanded into most aspects of public sector work? Can the nation be protected on the basis of traditional policing and intelligence work, or does it need a policy that understands “radicalisation” as indelibly connected to a specific religious ideology? Is the alienating impact of Prevent on British Muslims, who have reason to fear being snooped on by their youth workers, schools and—who knows—even their doctors, mitigated by its security benefits to the British public? Townsend does not seem interested in these issues, but they are precisely the sort of urgent policy questions thrown up by his book.



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A tragedy with deep roots: Abubaker Deghayes speaks to journalists after reports his son, Abdullah, was killed in Syria

Another flawed aspect of *No Return* is its attitude towards vulnerable young women in Brighton caught up in these radical cliques. Using the language of both the *Daily Mail* and of the caliphate fighter bros who believed sex slaves and multiple wives were their due, Townsend refers throughout to “jihadi brides,” instead of girls who have been trafficked. This language of “jihadi brides” has entrenched so many unreliable assumptions about the motives of the British citizens who travelled to Syria—to say nothing of the agency of those trafficked. The government, content to let the newspapers conduct their own show trials, now says it cannot repatriate even British women and children stranded in displacement camps in Syria because the public could not stomach it. These include Shamima Begum, one of the Bethnal Green girls. If Rachel in *No Return* had managed to leave Brighton for Syria, she would have been a troubled teenage girl recruited by an armed group for child marriage and sexual exploitation. If she had happened to have a Bangladeshi or Pakistani parent, she would have had her British citizenship stripped, and been left to rot in the desert. A decade from now, this will be a moral blight to rank with extraordinary rendition; but until then, well, jihadi brides.

The Deghayes case, Townsend argues, “revolutionised a new mindset, fundamentally changing the mechanics of the government’s flagship Prevent programme” and “challenged the understanding of radicalisation.” But the changes he cites—towards a multi-agency approach and the notion that “radicalisation” is bound up with social vulnerabilities—had been woven into the whole Prevent project from the off.

More discerning is his argument that “a strategy based on hoping that no one asks difficult questions

prevents the answers being found.” The lengths to which the government goes to obscure its own conduct makes pursuing those questions very difficult. Townsend tells us about the conclusions of Fiyaz Mughal, “director of an interfaith organisation,” who was asked to provide “independent scrutiny” of the inquiry into what went wrong with community integration in the city. Mughal muses about a lack of “social cohesion, a sense of unity” and Townsend, who skips on telling us that Mughal’s outfit is funded by the Home Office, protests that no one drilled down into “the issues, the ignorances, the injustices that caused the problem.” That is strictly true, but far from the whole truth.

Two of the Deghayes brothers, Abdullah and Jaffar, both died on the battlefield in 2014, age 18 and 17 respectively. Towards the end of the book, Townsend makes a poignant plea for a third, Amer, who now lives in the fiercely contested Syrian city of Idlib as a “freelance jihadist,” to be allowed to return home. Amer is, says Townsend, a sort of “Corbynista” who would pose little security threat.

The family’s tragedy has deep roots. Amer’s father Abubaker, the brother of a man tortured in Guantanamo and the father of two other sons killed in Syria, said in 2014: “I tell you that their grandfather was also killed by Gaddafi for refusing to bow down. My father’s grandfather was killed by the fascists, the Italians trying to colonise his country. So where do you point the finger? Is it to the first grandfather? Or to my father? Or to my brother? This is life.”

Azadeh Moaveni’s *“Guest House for Young Widows: Among the Women of ISIS”* (Scribe) was shortlisted for the Baillie Gifford Prize for non-fiction in 2019. She directs the Gender and Conflict Project at the International Crisis Group

While my sitar gently weeps

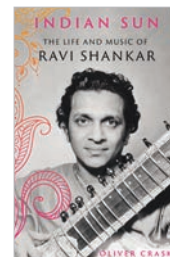
Ravi Shankar's music has shaped eastern and western traditions, argues *Amit Chaudhuri*

Ravi Shankar was born to a Bengali family as Robindra Shankar Chowdhury on 7th April 1920 in Banaras, north India. The story of the Bengali is a story of displacement—not just the displacement that came from the partition of the state upon independence in 1947, but also cultural displacement and remaking. Shankar's life and work is an exemplary product of this history. His father Shyam Shankar Chowdhury was a displaced Brahmin who was also a Middle Temple barrister and a man who, at the time of Shankar's birth, had made his home outside Bengal, in Banaras. Ravi Shankar was what Bengalis would have called a *prabashi Bangali*—an “expatriate Bengali,” part of a colonial scattering that fed accidentally into the resurrection of classical traditions. Like much of world history in both the west and the east, Indian tradition as we know it today is a recent reinvention; and Shankar would be one of its great reinventors.

The name Robindra, which became “Ravi,” is quite possibly a homage to Rabindranath Tagore, whose experimentation not only with genres but also how to live as an Indian and as an artist was a precursor for Shankar. Tagore's willingness to hit, miss or discover prefigures the unpredictable shifts in the sitar player's life. The word *robi* or, in its Devanagari spelling, *ravi*, means “sun,” and its punning, life-giving force is referenced in the title of Oliver Craske's compendious and immensely readable new biography, *Indian Sun*.

Ravi Shankar was the youngest of seven brothers, of whom the oldest was another experimenter, the dancer Uday. Uday never learnt any of the Indian classical dance forms. He chose to create his own unique style from a general sense of the traditions. He started his education in London as a student of fine arts. The painter William Rothenstein became, Craske quotes Uday as saying, “the first to open my eyes to the greatness and beauty of India and her arts.” Rothenstein was one of those minor English figures who became midwives in the fashioning, and facilitating, of the arts in India. Earlier, he had circulated Tagore's translation of his Bengali songs, the *Gitanjali*, among friends who included WB Yeats, leading to Tagore's Nobel Prize in 1913. Now we find Rothenstein, in 1920, nudging Uday towards an amorphous wonder called “India.” Uday Shankar was soon discovered by Anna Pavlova, and became famous after he danced with her at Covent Garden.

Ravi, at this point drawn to dance, became part of Uday's worldwide tours. On a trip to Calcutta in 1934, 14-year-old Ravi went to what was, and still is, called a classical music “conference” of performances by leading musicians. Here he first heard his future music teacher, Ustad Allauddin Khan, present an orchestral ensemble—unusual in Indian classical music. Craske writes: “On the first day he presented the Maihar Band, an ensemble he had formed from local orphaned boys to entertain guests at the royal palace in Maihar, where he was the court musician.



Indian Sun: The Life and Music of Ravi Shankar
by Oliver Craske
(Faber, £20)

Arriving late to formal training, Ravi Shankar practised the sitar “with the zeal of a convert”



Between them, they played sitar, sarod, tabla, violin, cello, clarinet, harmonium, a homemade sitar-banjo hybrid, and a xylophone-like invention of Allauddin Khan's called the naltarang, made by cutting down 24 old gun barrels belonging to the maharaja's guard."

The next day, Allauddin Khan did the more expected thing: he gave a solo exposition on the sarod that "moved" Ravi "deeply." Craske tells us that besides Tagore himself, also present was the 13-year-old Satyajit Ray for whose first film, *Pather Panchali*, Shankar would later score the music.

The next year, Shankar's largely absent father—who had grown estranged from his wife Hemangini and taken an English companion—died. With Hemangini's support, Ravi became Allauddin Khan's student in 1938 in Maihar: a mix of house guest, house help and disciple. This was a leap on both sides: a boy from an educated family stepping away from his domain; a traditional virtuoso allowing the boundary around him to be breached. It is prescient of a crossing of territories that would happen later, in places like California, when Americans inspired by Ravi Shankar would pick up sitars. Shankar recalls his guru was demanding, but not punitive.

Allauddin Khan was, as Shankar put it in a typically acute throwaway remark, a great "impurist," an artist who explored different styles of classical music, as well as the folk music of Bengal. If there's one thing this book reveals, it is that there's no static thing called "tradition." What TS Eliot wrote in his 1919 essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" is as true of Allauddin Khan as it is for Shankar: "The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered." And this is particularly pertinent to Shankar: tradition "cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour."

Shankar practised throughout the day. "It was unusual for someone as old as Robu to be starting formal training," writes Craske, "but he had the zeal of a convert." An apt word, because the modern Indian arts—and the sitar is as much an emblem of modernity as the past—were often created by outsiders, rather than "natural" inheritors, with a quasi-religious fervour. I say "quasi" because it's important to understand that the tradition—whatever its spiritual and philosophical moorings—is a secular one. It was called "classical" music to distinguish it from temple or scriptural music.

What Rothenstein had been to Tagore, George Harrison became to Shankar. But Harrison was more than a conduit; he was one of a group of artists in various genres of western music—Philip Glass, John Coltrane, Yehudi Menuhin, David Crosby—who learnt a new way of thinking about music from Shankar, while spreading his renown. (Coltrane and his wife Alice even called their son Ravi.) Shankar played across the major western venues, and appeared at the Monterey Festival and on *The Dick Cavett Show* with his perennial companion on the tabla, Alla Rakha. If you listen to these performances now, you find no dilution. You find an artist playing—despite having to accelerate like a high-speed train to showcase his art in a sometimes five-minute turn—with complete absorption and mastery, and executing rhythmic improvisations of such beauty that training is needed to grasp their full depth.

Craske tells us there was a sharp drop-off in his western listeners after Harrison and John Lennon disowned the Maharishi. (What did a godman have to do with the sitar?) By this time, Shankar was already concerned that Indian classical music had become conflated with psychedelia, drugs and rock, just as he'd resisted the comparisons made between Indian classical elaboration and jazz improvisation. Shankar was a populariser; but he was always a thinking musician—that's where both his engagement with and his reservations about the west came from. At some point, the hippie mind had married the music to gods, yoga and incense sticks. The "sitar explosion" of the 1960s is a typical Indian boom-and-bust story, like that of Tagore, a modern poet mistaken in the west for a sage.

Two other sitar players should be mentioned. The first is Allauddin Khan's daughter Annapurna Devi. She was Shankar's first wife—a match made by his guru. The marriage festered in a few years before later ending, notwithstanding the birth of a son, Shubho. It has always been surrounded by speculation, gossip and judgment—mainly to do with whether Annapurna's gifts as a musician threatened Ravi, and whether he frowned upon her playing in public. There were also, as Craske tells us, Annapurna's own insecurities about Ravi's faithfulness. Whatever the truth—and, as with every marriage, there's maybe no single truth here—it's worth remembering that husband and wife were extraordinary musicians with, despite having learnt from the same teacher, very different styles and temperaments. One was world conquering and sociable; the other reclusive. But a few private recordings of Annapurna's playing can be found on YouTube: in comparison to Ravi's liquid notes, hers are deep, and occasionally aggressive. Ravi may well have felt humbled listening to his wife, but it's difficult to believe that a man of his generosity wouldn't have been stirred. It's also hard to believe that Annapurna would have underrated her husband's incredible dexterity.

Then there's Ustad Vilayat Khan, Shankar's younger contemporary: the other great sitar player of the time. The term "the other" is problematic but inescapable, given Shankar's worldwide fame. But it explains Khan's chafing at Shankar, despite the respect they had for each other as musicians. Khan, like other critics, charged the increasingly famous Shankar of diluting classical music to please western audiences. There was also Khan's influential playing technique: the extremely difficult but exquisite *gayaki ang*, or "singing style." The human voice in north Indian classical music moves from note to note, sometimes serenely, sometimes with unbelievable intricacy, via the *meend* or glissando. In a string instrument like the sitar or guitar, the *meend* is a bent note, produced by a string being pulled sideways. Where a blues guitarist generally generates one bent note at once, Vilayat Khan, in an effort to emulate the human voice, found a way of producing four of five bent notes at a time. When someone asked Shankar if he ever played the *gayaki ang*, he received the irritable response: "No, I play the *bhaisa ang*," or "buffalo style," Shankar taking advantage of the homonymic closeness of the word *gayaki* to *gai ki*, or "of the cow."

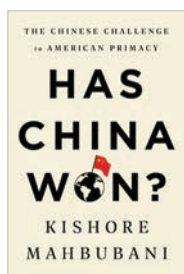
I watched Shankar play live twice, in the early and in the mid-1980s, the second time in a *jugalbandi* (or improvisational duet) with his brother-in-law Ali Akbar Khan. I went to listen to them with my mother, a great singer of the Tagore song, when I myself was deep into practising Hindustani classical music also with the "zeal of a convert" (a phrase I used in my 2009 novel about music, *The Immortals*). We noticed how much in form Shankar was, though both he and Ali Akbar Khan were in their sixties by then. To play with mastery at that age requires good health and sustained commitment—a passion independent of fame or reward.

The custodians of Indian classical music needn't have worried: in Shankar, it had a propagator of not only immense gifts but great seriousness. Though I would later write the libretto for the opera Shankar conceived of as *Sukanya*—his final project, based on a mythic character who shared his second wife's name—I never met him: he died in 2012 before I could get to California, where he had moved 20 years earlier.

Shankar's impact—and, through him, Indian music's—on western rock, jazz and classical music has been profound. Craske's biography is a reminder that we're only now beginning to understand the cultural interfaces preceding Shankar and succeeding him, which shaped the sounds we've been hearing for over a century. In Shankar and his contemporaries we have a new type who still challenges our pervasive notions of west and east, the antique and the modern. **D**

Amit Chaudhuri is a novelist and musician. "Finding the Raga: an Improvisation on Indian Music" will be published next year

Books in brief



Has China Won? The Chinese Challenge to American Primacy

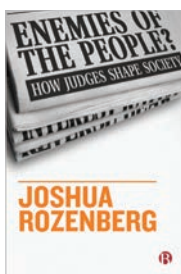
by Kishore Mahbubani (Public Affairs, £19.99)

Kishore Mahbubani is one of Asia's best-known policymakers and public intellectuals, who served for years as a senior Singaporean diplomat. *Has China Won?* is a compelling book on the tussle between the US and China for global supremacy. Mahbubani argues that China has an impressive story about its global role, if it just knew how to tell it. Whether it is the ability to lift millions out of poverty, or innovate in technology, the country has an alternative model that has attracted serious consideration, not least in the global south. He warns the US against thinking that its democratic values can be universalised. As the US declines under Donald Trump, China has gained influence by supporting the WTO and COP-26. Mahbubani is particularly good on his home region, southeast Asia, where China's diplomacy often succeeds in playing states off against one another.

However, Mahbubani can overreach, arguing that China has "antimilitary DNA" unlike belligerent America, which would come as a surprise to guerrilla warrior Mao Zedong. Similarly, calling the ruling entity the "Chinese Civilisation Party" underplays its Marxist roots. And now, the Covid-19 pandemic seems likely to do significant damage to China's global reputation.

Mahbubani's case for China is a bracing corrective to western-centric views, and there's scarcely a dull page. Yet it's clear that there are still doubts about the country's direction of travel. On the day I wrote this review, I saw in the news photos of protesting students in handcuffs in Hong Kong, and opened Jeffrey Wasserstrom's new book *Vigil: Hong Kong on the Brink*, a tender account of the city's agonies that cites the "deep depression" and "sense of failure" of its youth. If Beijing can't make its case by persuasion rather than force to the best and brightest in one of its most advanced regions, has it really won?

Rana Mitter



Enemies of the People? How Judges Shape Society

by Joshua Rozenberg (Bristol UP, £14.99)

"Do the judges have too much power? Are they unaccountable activists usurping the role of an elected parliament? Have they become enemies of the people?"

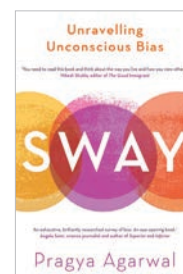
These are the questions Joshua Rozenberg, the pre-eminent legal correspondent, grapples with in his new book on the constitutional role of the judiciary. The title is taken from the *Daily Mail's* front page of 2016, declaring three High Court judges enemies of the people after they ruled that the government could not trigger Article 50 without parliament's approval. Yet the book delves deeper than Brexit.

Rozenberg offers a magisterial overview of key cases in legal history. With the clarity expected of an honorary silk, he explores judgments on issues ranging from murder to divorce, disability discrimination to Naomi Campbell's privacy, Prince Charles's private letters and cakes supporting gay marriage. The chapter on "assisted dying" cases is especially useful, as it illustrates an inherent tension between the Supreme Court and parliament. The breadth of Rozenberg's analysis means this book is a must-read for law students or the eager lay reader.

More than just offering interesting case analysis, the book attempts to explain how judges make law. With quotations from judges themselves, Rozenberg analyses a range of judicial approaches and presents different characters from the bench who have played a role in developing the common law.

Clear throughout is Rozenberg's respect for the judiciary. Yet voices fiercely critical of its supposed recent "activism" are also heard, with lengthy quotations from former Supreme Court justice Jonathan Sumption and the Judicial Power Project. It is only in the last chapter that Rozenberg puts his cards on the table and states that the judges are not our enemies, but "just about the only friends we have."

Jake Richards



Sway: Unravelling Unconscious Bias

by Pragma Agarwal (Bloomsbury, £16.99)

Attractive people are less likely to commit crimes. Regional accents are not to be trusted. Hurricanes with male names are riskier than those with female ones. In *Sway*, behavioural scientist Pragma Agarwal enumerates the variety of our unconscious biases, and the ways in which they shape individual behaviour and public life.

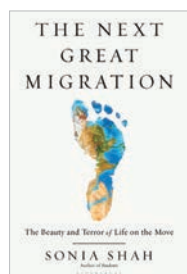
The book catalogues different types of bias—racism, sexism, ageism—as well as the mind's cognitive shortcuts that sustain them. These include present bias (giving greater importance to the now than the future), confirmation bias (favouring information that conforms to beliefs we already hold) and hindsight bias (in retrospect, events seem more predictable than they really were).

Agarwal explains how algorithms magnify the implicit biases of their designers with an invisibility that makes their effects insidious. This feeds a "global assumption of 'whiteness'": self-driving cars are more likely to hit people with darker skin, while electronic soap dispensers are more sensitive to white hands.

Although admirably detailed, *Sway's* chapters lack sustained narratives that would make the statistics and studies really sting. Also missing is a sober consideration of how truly "unconscious" implicit biases are. Is there really a dividing line between the prejudices we know we hold, and those we cannot see?

Sway lacks the punch of *Invisible Women* by Caroline Criado Perez, or *Thinking, Fast and Slow* by Daniel Kahneman. In addition, Agarwal's solutions for "de-biasing" take up just three pages, and consist of vaguely imploring us to become aware of our blind-spots, to make decisions slowly, avoid generic language about social groups and undertake unspecified "prejudice-breaking" training. *Sway* proves how much we already know about bias, yet how little we know about moving beyond it.

Kate Womersley



The Next Great Migration: The Beauty and Terror of Life on the Move

by Sonia Shah (Bloomsbury, £14.99)

The travel writer Bruce Chatwin believed that man's "migratory drive" led him to wander the world in search of novelty. Restlessness also forms the central thesis of Sonia Shah's latest book *The Next Great Migration*, an examination of relocation in all its forms—human and wild—in the context of impending climate-related disruption.

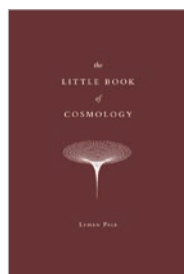
Shah, an American investigative journalist and author of the prescient *Pandemic* (2017), delves into the origins of anti-immigrant rhetoric—starting from Carl Linnaeus's early attempts to sort humans into colour-coded sub-species—and unpicks the notion of a static world, in which organisms are native to one place. She sketches the development of the fields of biogeography, invasion biology and scientific racism, building a convincing case against nativism.

It's a dazzling tour through 300 years of scientific history, though occasionally disconcerting. She raises theories aloft, supported by cast-iron evidence, then demolishes them in the next breath. The studies were flawed, she says, and so they were. But after the umpteenth instance, one loses faith not only in the thinkers of the past but in science altogether. What other houses are we building on the sand?

Sometimes her approach lands awkwardly. Shah contrasts, for example, the gradual inching of the checkerspot butterfly with Afghan refugees fleeing persecution and Haitians struggling through the rainforested Darién Gap in Panama up towards the US border. This habit of conflation muddies the argument. What do annually migrating seabirds truly have in common with Syrian refugees?

Chatwin's own rambling book on wanderlust grew huge, amorphous and finally—as Chatwin admitted—unreadable. Shah's book is far from unreadable (indeed, it is engrossing) but she has fallen into a similar trap.

Cal Flynn



The Little Book of Cosmology

by Lyman Page (Princeton, £16.99)

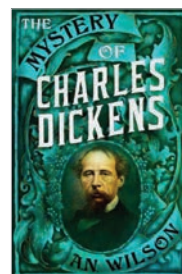
Lyman Page is a professor of astronomy at Princeton and his principal area of research has for decades been the heat afterglow of the big bang. My first thought on opening the book was: "This will be just another academic jumping on the popular science bandwagon and short-changing the public with a pretty ordinary book." Nothing could be further from the truth. This ranks alongside Steven Weinberg's *The First Three Minutes* as one of the best books on cosmology I have ever read.

The most striking thing about the night sky is that it is mostly black. However, if instead of seeing visible light, your eyes could see a type of invisible light known as microwaves, the most striking thing about the night sky would be that it is white. The entire universe is glowing with the "afterglow" of the big bang fireball. How could it not be when the light of the fireball was bottled up in the universe and so literally had nowhere to go? Greatly cooled by the expansion of the universe in the 13.82bn years since the big bang, the "cosmic background radiation" now consists of low-energy radio waves, principally microwaves.

Imprinted on the cosmic background radiation is a "baby photo" of the universe when it was a mere 400,000 years old and matter from the cooling fireball was beginning the long process of clumping under gravity that would culminate in galaxies such as our own Milky Way. From that photo can be extracted the six numbers that define our universe, from its age of 13.82 bn years to the fact that 70 per cent of cosmic mass-energy is in the form of mysterious "dark energy" whose repulsive gravity is speeding up cosmic expansion.

Cosmic background radiation, in short, has ushered in the age of precision cosmology, which explains perhaps why this book is principally about that phenomenon. *The Little Book of Cosmology* is a compact treasure-trove of cosmic insights to be read, mulled over, and read again.

Marcus Chown



The Mystery of Charles Dickens

by AN Wilson (Atlantic, £20)

Literary biographers love a puzzle. But few practitioners of the craft have answered the allure of enigma with the alacrity of AN Wilson. His study of CS Lewis made much of the apparent conundrum that the creator of Narnia was able to inspire in equal measure feelings of hostility and affection. His *Life of Milton* placed at its heart the supposed paradox that the man who was capable of writing *Paradise Lost* was also capable of treating his wife and daughters appallingly. The result, as Martin Amis remarked, was a work that read like a "thesaurus of speculation."

To these contributions we can add Wilson's new biography of Dickens which, as its title indicates, is also preoccupied by mystery. Opening with an account of the "mystery" of Dickens's death in 1870 (was it brought on by an ill-advised tryst with his secret lover, the actress Nelly Ternan?), the book goes on to address a number of additional "mysteries" that Wilson regards as central to understanding his subject's art and existence. Among these lie "the mystery of his childhood and his past; the mystery of his passionate, sincere and burning charity... the mystery of his relationship with the public... the mystery of his last, unfinished novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*."

Most of these puzzles are solved, if that is the word, by plundering Dickens's fiction for hints about his character and motivations, engaging in the occasional bit of amateur psychology, and making much of the proposition that his sensibility and his creations can best be explained by embracing the bloodless insight that Dickens was a "divided self."

Arising from these modes of analysis is an endeavour whose aptitude for banality—"Dickens was a writer like no other"; "of all the great novelists, Dickens is the most mysterious"—is almost impressive. John Carey once observed that Dickens used his imagination to transform the world. Wilson tells us little of the alchemy by which he did so.

Matthew Adams

Recommends

Art

Emma Crichton-Miller

Young Rembrandt

[BBC iPlayer & ashmolean.org](#)

Simon Schama, in his episode of *Museums in Quarantine*, explains: “Just when we needed art the most, for a hit of exhilaration, a touch of comfort, gallery doors shut, the lights switched off.” The doors to *Young Rembrandt* may be shut until at least 4th July, but Schama talks us through it beautifully. We learn how this prodigiously humane, prodigally gifted artist transformed from self-dramatising young pretender to mature practitioner. The Ashmolean’s online exposition will prepare you for the reopening too.



Léon Spilliaert

[royalacademy.org.uk](#)

Also mothballed, this first UK monographic exhibition of Spilliaert’s spooky work has been extended until 20th September. Born in Ostend in 1881, Spilliaert was a leading Belgian symbolist, much influenced by Nietzsche and Poe. The RA offers a video tour, without commentary, of the 80-plus works in situ, from his atmospheric landscapes and interiors, to his startling, sleep-deprived self-portraits. Alan Hollinghurst has also written an essay on the website.

British Surrealism: 1783-1952

[dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk](#)

You have not yet missed this major exhibition. Looking at the distinctive strand in British Surrealism from forerunners William Blake and Henry Fuseli to intriguing 20th-century painters such as John Armstrong and Marion Adams, to mainstream figures like Bacon, Moore and Freud, curator David Boyd Haycock eschews chronology in favour of a theme-driven design. You will have to wait to experience its dream logic, but track down the playful catalogue.

Theatre

Michael Coveney

Hamilton

[disneyplus.com](#), 3rd July

The most radical—and brilliant—new musical of recent years was filmed “live” on Broadway, at the Richard Rodgers Theatre in 2016, and is scheduled for general release later this year. Disney has jumped the gun with an online release of what it describes as a leap forward in the art of “live capture” with a free month’s trial or monthly sign up. Many of the original Broadway cast figure, including creator Lin-Manuel Miranda in the title role. The show both celebrates hip-hop and raises the bar in a Richard Rodgers tradition.

A Streetcar Named Desire

[dramaonlinelibrary.com](#)

This was a great revival at the Young Vic in 2014 of Tennessee Williams’s steamy drama of hothouse confrontation and sensuality in the Deep South, with Gillian Anderson of *The X-Files* and *Sex Education* adjusting her coruscating performance as Blanche DuBois to close-up-and-personal for the National Theatre collection of classic titles. There are 30 of them now, and they come down the line from Bloomsbury publishers. Watch out, too, for Vanessa Kirby, superb as the first Princess Margaret in *The Crown*, as Blanche’s sister Stella.

Les Misérables

[lesmis.com/concert](#)

When Cameron Mackintosh closed the Queen’s Theatre to refurbish and rename it the Sondheim, he moved the world’s longest running musical next door to the Gielgud Theatre in a fully-costumed, lit and semi-staged concert version that many felt improved on the original stage production. Half your £9.99 download will go to NHS charities, and you get a definitive version sung by Alfie Boe, Michael Ball, Carrie Hope Fletcher, Katy Secombe, Shan Ako and Matt Lucas.



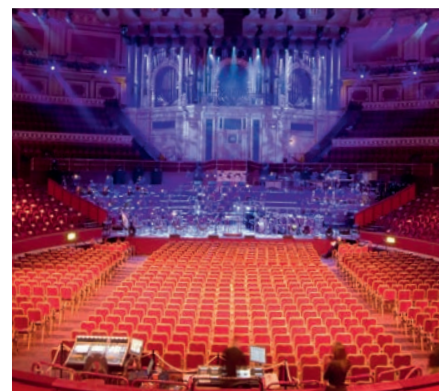
Classical & opera

Alexandra Coghlan

Tanglewood Online Festival

[bso.org](#)

While the Tanglewood festival in Massachusetts is cancelled, the online version offers a mixture of new and archive, audio and filmed performances. The line-up includes pianists Daniil Trifonov and Emanuel Ax, violinists Joshua Bell and Pinchas Zukerman and Yo-Yo Ma. On Wednesday evenings there will be performances by Brooklyn Rider, the Danish String Quartet and the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Stick around for Boston Pops concerts hosted by James Taylor.



Bavarian State Opera: Monday Concerts

[staatsoper.de](#)

Tickets to Munich’s opulent Bavarian State Opera don’t come cheap, so don’t miss the chance to attend for free this summer. In addition to a small archive of filmed productions, the company is presenting a regular series of Monday concerts, broadcast live from the opera house itself. The July programme has yet to be released, but previous artists have included Jonas Kaufmann and Christian Gerhaher, violinist Julia Fischer and pianist Igor Levit.

The BBC Proms

[bbc.co.uk/proms](#), from 17th July

The BBC Proms offers the first green shoot of hope for late summer. While the first six weeks of the festival will involve broadcasts of archive performances, with a Grand Virtual Orchestra launching the First Night, the last two weeks see the first live performances—putting soloists and ensembles in the Royal Albert Hall for socially distanced performances broadcast to viewers at home.

Film

Wendy Ide

A White, White Day

Streaming from 3rd July

When a stoic widower starts to suspect that his late wife was having an affair, grief starts to curdle into something more destructive. This terrific, atmospheric drama follows a quiet, decent man who becomes obsessed with unearthing the truth, no matter the pain it will cause. It's a superb character study, which harnesses the mercurial moods of the volcanic Icelandic landscape to capture a sense of a seemingly solid and immutable man and the anger that simmers under the surface.

The Booksellers

Streaming from 3rd July

This charming documentary peers under the tattered dust-jacket of an embattled world. The antiquarian book dealers of New York are under siege from exorbitant rents and the internet. Rare book collecting is about "the hunt," says one dealer, something that online shopping has robbed from the experience. Still, a band of book obsessives persist, peddling first editions, manuscripts and volumes bound in human skin. The meandering structure evokes the experience of wandering through a dusty shop, chancing on treasures.



Saint Frances

Streaming from 10th July

A prizewinner at South by SouthWest film festival last year, *Saint Frances* is a wry crowd-pleaser which follows a thirty-something woman whose life has stalled. Bridget (played by Kelly O'Sullivan, who also wrote the screenplay) stumbles into a job as a nanny, while also having to contend with an unplanned pregnancy and abortion. Against the odds, she forms a bond with her six-year-old charge. What could be a saccharine tale of a belated coming of age is a spiky account of female friendship, fertility and flawed life choices.

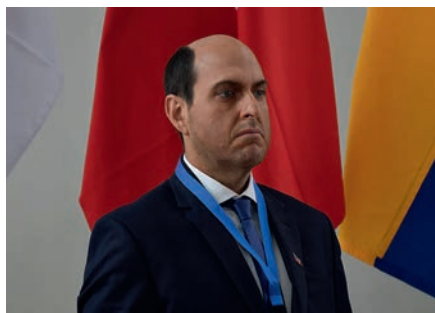
Television

Chris Harvey

El Presidente

Amazon Prime Video, 5th June

Allegations of corruption in football's governing body, Fifa, have been around since the early 2000s. But it wasn't until the scandal engulfed not only the sport's powerful president, Sepp Blatter, but also French footballing great Michel Platini, president of European football's ruling body Uefa, that the case made headlines around the world in 2015. This drama examines the bribes and backroom deals through the story of Chilean official Sergio Jadue, played by Andrés Parra, below.



Talking Heads

BBC One, end of June

Alan Bennett's monologues have made it on to school syllabuses since they were first aired in two series in 1988 and 1998 and have now been revisited and remade by the BBC. New actors take over the roles in 10 of the originals, alongside two new monologues written for the series by Bennett. The outstanding cast includes Martin Freeman taking over from Bennett himself in *A Chip in the Sugar* and *Killing Eve*'s Jodie Comer playing Julie Walters' role in *Her Big Chance*. Kristin Scott Thomas, Imelda Staunton and Tamsin Greig add to the heavyweight line-up.

The Salisbury Poisonings

BBC One

A superb cast marks out this three-part drama about the poisoning of Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia with a Russian nerve agent in Salisbury in 2018. Skripal had been a double agent for the British from 1995 until his arrest in 2004, and served time in a penal colony before settling in the UK. Anne-Marie Duff, Rafe Spall, MyAnna Buring and Mark Addy—excellent in ITV's recent *White House Farm*—star in this dramatisation of a national emergency.

Podcasts

Charlotte Runcie

Rule of Three

ruleofthreepod.com

Writers and comedians talk about the comedy that had the biggest influence on them and analyse how it worked and what was so groundbreaking about it. For instance, you get Aisling Bea on *Father Ted*, discussing how life-changing it was for her to see Irish people laughing at themselves on TV; Lucy Prebble on *When Harry Met Sally...*; Charlie Brooker on *Airplane!*; and a lockdown special edition about the strangely prescient "Remain Indoors" sketch from *That Mitchell and Webb Look*.

On the Marie Curie Couch

Marie Curie

Plenty of organisations and charities have their own podcast, but not many are as creative and interesting as this one from Marie Curie. It features lots of different famous people in therapeutic conversation with bereavement support expert and social worker Jason Davidson. Guests include Hugh Laurie, Alison Steadman, Jane Horrocks and Hugh Grant, all of whom talk sensitively about their own experiences of grief, and tell us their thoughts on how to cope with bereavement and serious illness.

Grounded with Louis Theroux

BBC Radio 4

Louis Theroux (below) has launched his own interview podcast series, which is also broadcast on Radio 4. He chooses a selection of people that, he says, he's always wanted to speak to in depth, and interviews them over Zoom in the age of social distancing. The line-up of guests is eclectic—so far there's Boy George, Jon Ronson, Helena Bonham Carter and Lenny Henry—and as Theroux is such a distinguished interviewer, he gets more out of them than many others would.



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Prospect life

Illustrations by Kate Hazell



Home front

Sandwiched

Hephzibah Anderson

An electric scooter may not seem the likeliest set of wheels for a desperado breakout but it's how my mother is plotting to escape my shielding ministrations. She's in her 70s, so while she isn't about to risk public transport any time soon, a motorised toddler ride is apparently just fine.

Her destination? The allotment, a socially-distanced joy she's determined to snatch back, even as friends and family urge her to stay home. The trouble is, her allotment is too far away to walk, she doesn't drive and has nowhere to stow a bike. While she'd happily thumb a well-ventilated lift in a flatbed trailer (I jest not), she doesn't know anybody who owns one. Hence the e-scooter.

The idea has my four-year-old twitchy with envy but I'm sputtering on about charging times and highway legislation. "You'll need a helmet," I lecture via video call. "Are they even legal on bike paths?" As my voice edges up in pitch, my mum's hand reaches for the screen. "Just turning you down," she explains, the septuagenarian equivalent of a teen's exaggerated eye-roll.

Senior mutiny is something many of us encountered over the past few months. In the early days of the coronavirus crisis, my social media feeds were chock-full of friends shrilly despairing of their heedless elders, 70- and 80-somethings intent on zipping into town to catch an exhibition or keep that lunch date. Suggestions that age-specific quarantine measures might be brought in provoked heckling from the likes of David Blunkett and John Humphrys. "That is not policy: it's discrimination," Humphrys fumed. "I will not comply."



Theirs is the first generation of seniors to have balked at being called granny and gramps, embraced the late-life crisis and later-life divorce, and begun out-drinking their younger counterparts. Indoctrinated by the mantra that 70 is the new 50, it should come as no surprise that "YOLO (you only live once) grandparents," as journalist Benjamin Wallace-Wells has dubbed them, haven't enjoyed being treated like geriatrics all of a sudden.

"Senior mutiny is something many of us encountered over the past few months"

Meanwhile, their children are realising that reverse parenting can be just as demanding as the conventional kind. My style? Hectoring and helicoptering, apparently.

For those of us in the blessed position of having loved ones who remain hearty and independent into their 80s, it's unsettling to have to think of them as "clinically vulner-

able." It can seem a foretaste of an inevitability that we ordinarily succeed in pushing to the farthest reaches of our minds. Oh to trade this frazzled, snippy anxiety for the burn of embarrassment that our parents inspired back in adolescence.

But if it's distressing for us, it can only be vastly more so for them. Psychologists have described the worry that some people are experiencing as a kind of grief for the loss of past pleasures and possibilities. That feeling must be considerably more acute if the sandglass is bottom-heavy.

And yet it's we who are not old who are making what my mum would term a "fuss." We might feel like we're parenting our parents but they still have plenty to teach us. Let's not forget, either, that despite their grumbling, it hasn't been the elderly who have been predominantly flouting lockdown rules.

Plenty has been written about the so-called sandwich generation, a fix born of lengthening lifespans and delayed parenthood, leaving the middle-aged pressed between the demands of raising children and the duties of elder care. Its toll can be exacting, and it is shouldered disproportionately by women. Less discussed are ►

the joys these responsibilities can bring. Our parents—together with any children in our orbit—hold us in place, perfectly positioned to appreciate the wheel of life.

The parent-child bond is fascinating in its ever-evolving complexity. But all too often, its development stalls in adulthood. Checking in more regularly, as many are currently doing, has brought intergenerational benefits. Back in May, a survey found that 61 per cent of the UK's elderly felt more cared for by relatives since self-isolation began, while 54 per cent of young Britons feel a deeper connection with their grandparents than ever before.

As for my mum and her e-scooter, I've decided to follow her lead and channel my fretfulness in a more life-enhancing direction with the gift of a helmet. It's sparkly gold with lightning bolts; perfect for a 70-something rebel.



The wild frontier

Cheep thrills

Cal Flynn

Birdwatching is having a moment during lockdown, as thousands of normally-uninterested eyes take note of the life around us—in our gardens, on our daily stroll—for the first time. For many, it seems as though the birds are now louder and more active than ever.

Ornithologists, however, assure us that the change has been largely our own. In empty streets, birds have felt more present than ever. In our quieter lives, the comings and goings in between branches have become more enthralling than before.

Lockdown began at the perfect time of year to inspire a nation of twitchers. Since we were confined to our homes in March, migratory birds have been returning in waves, offering us a steady stream of new species to identify. Here in Orkney, I watched the first swallows of the year making landfall from across the Pentland Firth—whipping through the air, tails streaming behind them—not in any way flagging after their long journey from South Africa. A friend tells me that sand martins have taken up residence further up the coast.



Other species have been showing off their courting behaviours for us to admire. I've been watching the eider ducks in Stromness Harbour: sleek monochrome males ululating to their tawny lady folk in the shallows. And in the meadow down by the coast, where marsh marigolds glint like gold coins and flag irises rise like pennants, lapwings tumble through the reeds and skylarks holler from a hundred feet high.

“In our quieter lives, the comings and goings in between branches have become more enthralling than before”

Urban locations are no less rich with life. For those taking heed of the avian life in their local streets for the first time, I recommend the *Collins British Bird Guide* in the form of the phone app, which makes identification as easy as it can be (birds are searchable by size, colour or shape of bill) and a memoir called *Birds Art Life* by Toronto writer and illustrator Kyo Maclear—who, during a difficult period, takes up birdwatching. She trains herself in

the art of noticing: of waiting and watching until something beautiful makes itself seen.

I think much of the pleasure we find in birdwatching comes from a sense that they live a life of liberty—a life on the wing, lacking in the sort of constraints affecting us right now. But of course the birds are also entering a period of house arrest and concentrated child-rearing themselves.

In the tree behind my house, a dozen noisy rooks have built untidy nests. I see wrens and starlings flitting, frantic, from holes in walls. Chick-rearing is a stressful time for birds. Those that nest on the ground, like terns and curlews and lapwings, face constant risk from predation (or blundering feet). They work hard to keep their brood fed. A blue tit with a clutch of chicks might need to catch as many as 1,000 caterpillars a day.

I read an interesting book recently: *An Indifference of Birds* by Richard Smyth, which portrays human history from a bird's eye view. In it, Smyth depicts humans as the background extras in the lives of birds, who take advantage of our man-made cliffs (buildings) and proffered nest boxes, but feel no special affinity with us. It reminded me to view their behaviour on their own terms. So: admire our avian neighbours, by all means. They are beautiful, and endlessly interesting. But don't envy them; they, too, have been dealing with a difficult period of confinement.



Food court

Beyond the limelight

Jonathan Nunn

Being a chef used to be so easy, didn't it? All you needed to do was put on an oversized white hat, do some cooking, say "oui" a lot, and that was it. You were a chef. And then suddenly it wasn't so simple. A tyre company started handing out stars to prize restaurants. There were awards, cookery shows and international conferences. People started calling you a rock star and you started behaving like one. The media began to call you "gods of food;" cooking, as the new *MasterChef* asserted, didn't get "any tougher than this." Supermarkets asked you to put your name to ready meals. You started to suspect that it was all getting A. Bit. Too. Much.

Perhaps you can trace the rot back to Georges Auguste Escoffier, the legendary chef known as the father of 20th-century cookery. Escoffier codified the rules of the kitchen and whipped it into shape, setting in an unquestioned chain of command from the *chef de cuisine* to the *plongeur*. He called this hierarchy *brigade de cuisine*. The military association was very much intentional—it ensured discipline. As Major Colvin said in HBO's *The Wire*, "You call something a war and pretty soon everyone's gonna be running around acting like warriors." Cooking has always been difficult work, but somewhere along the way the hardship got fetishised.

With the crisis shutting down most restaurants, I suspect that many chefs are using this downtime to figure out what cooking is all about, and what really got them interested in it in the first place. What does it mean to cook for someone? I've heard many answers, but the best was given a few years ago by Olivier Roellinger, the Breton chef who in his pomp held three Michelin stars. Roellinger came to cooking after being brutally attacked by a gang at 21 and spending two

years recuperating at home, enjoying meals from his mother. When asked about the essence of cooking, Roellinger described a mother scooping plain rice into a child's mouth. For him, a chef, no matter how lofty, must always bear this image in mind. It is their job to nourish the customer and make them happy. It's no coincidence that Roellinger later renounced all his stars and gave up professional cooking.

This type of cooking goes on in less celebrated kitchens already: domestic ones, of course, but also in care homes, in community kitchens, and by furloughed chefs who might currently be cooking for the NHS. Food writer and chef Ruby Tandoh calls these zones "blurred spaces where some of the knottiest issues in our food systems are worked out." At their best, they put the chef and consumer on equal footing. They create a back-and-forth dialogue that acknowledges the needs of the eater and asks the chef to keep their ego in check.

"Many chefs are using this downtime to figure out what cooking is all about"

It is these spaces that chefs should now learn from. The virus poses an existential threat to restaurants but it does offer chefs some time to work out what actually brings them happiness and a chance to respond to what their community needs, not what they think may bring accolades. This means being more transparent and making food that isn't inherently wasteful. It means promoting connections with local suppliers, making more things that can be taken to be prepared at home, and streamlining a menu that doesn't just make money but also pays staff more—to make the whole system sustainable in sum. Cooking once more has to be seen as an interconnected process that encompasses producers, butchers, bakers, waiters, the environment and whole communities, rather than a rarefied art of one genius.

In 2008, when the financial crash hit, we said restaurants wouldn't be the same again. For a while they weren't, but they quickly relapsed. Ballooning rents and the rise of private equity pushed more chefs into the restaurant rat race to survive. Now, the slump is deeper, and with social distancing the fight to survive feels all the more intense. The realist in me thinks the same will happen again, that if restaurants get through this, consumers will soon forget the pandemic's lessons and restaurateurs will once again be forced to chase stars and fame. But if I'm wrong, then maybe the golden age of restaurants isn't over. Maybe it's yet to come.

The Clapham Omnibus by Hannah Berry





Classical musing

Ovid's climate crisis

Charlotte Higgins

Is our destruction of nature responsible for Covid-19? The contention among some specialists in the field is that humanity's spoliation of the environment creates the conditions for new diseases to thrive, and viruses to leap from animals to people. A column in the *New York Times* put it this way: "We cut the trees; we kill the animals or cage them and send them to markets. We disrupt ecosystems, and we shake viruses loose from their natural hosts."

There has been anxiety about humans' intervention in nature for thousands of years, and it's notable, if depressing, how little effect it has had on the way our species behaves. The idea that human creativity and innovation is in conflict with the natural order of things is a common trope in Greek and Roman literature.

The seeds of this thinking find beautiful expression in a famous choral ode in Sophocles' 5th-century BC play *Antigone*, which contains the famous line (in Frank Nisetich's translation): "none is more wonderful, more terrible than man." (In Greek, it must be said, this is niftier, because the ideas of "wonderful" and "terrible" are contained in a single word, *deimos*.) The ode goes on to describe how people have brilliantly learned how to fish and hunt, to domesticate animals, to build ships, and to establish cities. The whole thing might be a triumphant hymn of praise to human progress, but it isn't: it leaves a disquieting aftertaste. People, concludes the ode, are as likely to use this ingenuity for evil as for good.

I've been struck in recent years by how easy it is to read parts of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*—the Roman writer's 1st-century AD poem about mythical transformations—through an environmental lens. Take the story of Phaethon. The young boy is brought up by his mother on a remote island; his father is the sun god Helios, who passes high overhead every day in his chariot but never pauses. Phaethon bugs his mother to give him proof that this distant deity really is his father, until, exasperated, she tells her son to visit him in his palace. Phaethon extracts a promise from his father that he be allowed to drive the chariot through the skies, just



for one day. But it goes terribly wrong. Phaethon cannot control the horses. The chariot veers wildly off course and plunges towards the Earth. The heat of the sun parches the fields and dries up the crops and the trees. Forest fires rage; snow melts on the mountain peaks. The Earth herself, scorched, cries out in distress to Jupiter, who takes a thunderbolt and hurls it at Phaethon, killing him. Reading this story through the climate crisis, it speaks eloquently of human arrogance, and our delusions of control.

Helen Morales, in her new book *Antigone Rising: the Subversive Power of the Ancient Myths*, also reads Ovid's telling of the story of King Erysichthon through an environmental lens. His name literally translates from Greek as "earth-ripper," so you get the idea. In order to build a banquet hall, he has a grove of trees sacred to the goddess Ceres felled—and cuts down the first tree himself, killing the nymph inside, though not before she curses him. Ceres makes the king ravenously hungry. The more he eats, the more he wants. He eats through all the food in the land, all the crops; he burns through his wealth and he even sells his daughter. Then he eats himself, gnawing at his own limbs. It doesn't need much decoding to be read as a perfect myth for now.

The way we were

Extracts from memoirs and diaries
compiled by Ian Irvine

Hot summers

1800 On 26th July, Dorothy Wordsworth writes in her journal at Dove Cottage, Grasmere: "Still hotter. I sat with William in the orchard all the morning and made my shoes. In the afternoon from excessive heat I was ill with the headache and toothache and went to bed. I was refreshed with washing myself after I got up, but it was too hot to walk till near dark, and then I sat upon the wall finishing my shoes."

1939 On 6th June, the novelist Barbara Pym notes in her diary: "On the hottest day of the year I saw two nuns buying a typewriter in Selfridges. Oh, what were they going to do with it?"

1940 On 5th September, Virginia Woolf writes in her journal: "Hot, hot, hot. Record heat wave, record summer if we kept records this summer. 2.30 a plane zooms, ten minutes later air-raid sounds; twenty minutes later all clear. Hot, I repeat, and doubt that I'm a poet."

1941 On 20th June, George Orwell records in his diary: "We have all been in a semi-melting condition for some days past. It struck me that one minor Benefit of this war is that it has broken the newspapers of their idiotic habit of making headline news out of yesterday's weather."

1943 On 18th May, the writer Denston Welch writes in his journal: "Today I am by the river below East Peckham. I'm writing letters, roasting in the sun, sweating, burning, turning red. The feathers of the grass tickle me and I am almost stupefied. Oh, how lovely it is. Bang in front is a concrete pill-box covered with nets, slowly being swallowed up by weeds. They'll win, every time."

1955 On 12th July, Evelyn Waugh observes in his diary from Piers Court, Gloucestershire: "High summer continues. I shall not go to London until it breaks. This is a pleasant house in the heat. For the first time since I planted it the honeysuckle outside my bedroom window scents the room at night. I don't sleep naturally. I have tried everything—exercise, cold baths, fasting, feasting, solitude, society. Always I have to take paraldehyde and sodium amytal. My life is really too empty for a diarist."



Popularity context

A rose is a rose

Caroline O'Donoghue

Recently I realised that I have the worst-kept balcony in my whole building. I wouldn't have minded much before, but during lockdown we had no choice but to treasure our outdoor spaces, and it was painfully revealed that I had not treasured mine. Four tiles of my balcony have been given over to a piece of AstroTurf that my dog defecates on. The rest of the space is ashtrays, a cheap table and chairs, and a half-empty bottle of Miller. Meanwhile, from the street, I admired rows and rows of balconies exquisitely tended to: ivy trellis, hammocks, and bonsai trees. Inspired, I got to work.

The garden centres were still closed, so I decided to go online and investigate artificial alternatives. As I hovered over the reviews for "ARTIFICIAL MONSTERA PLANT 60CM," I felt a slight ickiness. A sense that this was tacky, cheating and a little shameful. To buy a fake plant when you could grow a real one is like admitting that you are incapable of nurturing something—that you're the cold woman in a romcom who has to undergo a life-changing transformation by trading her corporate pencil skirts for jeans and throwing her phone into a river.

I became annoyed by my own indecisiveness, and even more annoyed at how much spiritual weight I was putting on something as stupid as an artificial plant. But the strange thing about plastic plants is that almost everyone seems to have weird feelings about them. A fake flower is fine on a cake or on a hairband. Fake flowers as a gift, however, are beyond strange. If someone sent you a bouquet of

long-stemmed plastic red roses, you would simply call the police. It's the "uncanny valley" of gift-giving: no one can describe how and why it's weird, it just is.

Perhaps something in us is hardwired to think of gifts as ephemeral. Wine, cut flowers and chocolate are hits because they are expensive, aesthetic and pointless. They say "I love you so much, I'm willing to waste money on a temporary experience for you, one I myself may not even benefit from!" They say: even if you hate this, you won't have to suffer it for very long.

We all agree that plastic flowers are OK in offices. Nobody wants to see a wilted begonia at their dentist's office; dually, nobody wants to pay extra to visit the kind of dentist who can afford to waste time on plant care. But this wasn't always the case. Artificial plants first enjoyed their big commercial boom in the 1950s and 60s, when polyethylene—a durable, waxy plastic invented during the Second World War—allowed for the world's first realistic-looking mass-produced blooms. Plastic flower agencies were so popular that they came with their own "gardener" who showed up at your office to clean and rotate your blooms for an extra \$250 a month, real money in postwar currency.

"A fake flower is fine on a cake or on a hairband. Fake flowers as a gift, however, are beyond strange"

The appeal of plastic flowers in the 1950s and 60s had more to do with the trends of the time than the practicalities of keeping plants alive. When Dustin Hoffman was assured that there was "a great future in plastics" in the 1967 Hollywood classic *The Graduate*, he was getting sound advice: plastic wasn't just a material, but an entire aesthetic. Colourful, shiny, cheap and everywhere. Suburban neighbourhoods mushroomed just as office buildings ballooned from three-clerks-in-a-big-room to multi-storey buildings. Having the same eucalyptus pot on every floor of your office created uniformity, while at the same time pink plastic flamingos in your garden created a certain ersatz individuality within safe limits. The inauthenticity and lifelessness of plastic meant it was an easy tool for control in an era that needed to regain a sense of it. The war had shattered lives, and the 1950s was an era dedicated to lacquering the shattered pieces.

Perhaps it's too convenient to point out that the world fell in love with flowers that never died amid a global grieving process. Did plastic flowers proverbially bloom so much back then because the psychic weight of wreath-laying and grave-tending was too burdensome for a generation that was trying to move on? It's a disturbing parallel, one that emerged again in the 2000s when bowls of fake fruit started cropping up in middle-class American homes during the worst days of the Iraq War. "Is it a stretch to say fake fruit let us forget about the inevitability of death?" asked the lifestyle blog *Apartment Therapy*.

And so, as always, I end up cycling back to my own behaviour: am I looking at fake plants due to my inadequate balcony, or am I following a Covid-induced home improvement fad? When the news is filled with fatalities and every supermarket trip is a health scare, is it nice to have just one object in your life that can claim to last forever? **P**



Prospect Economics and investment



The analyst: Megan Greene Chasing yields in a new world

The coronavirus crisis will leave no one untouched by the time it's contained. Hundreds of thousands will have lost their lives and hundreds of millions will have lost their jobs. There will be long-term macroeconomic and investment implications once we begin to recover. Most of these trends were already under way, but will be accelerated by the crisis.

When the recovery takes hold, nationalism and protectionism will remain firmly in place. Before the virus hit, the United States had already imposed tariffs on China, but the current crisis has pushed other countries to adopt go-it-alone strategies as well. France, Germany, South Korea, Brazil, India, Turkey, Russia and dozens of others restricted exports of medical supplies, pharmaceuticals and food. It is in this context that the United Kingdom hopes to strike a trade deal with the European Union before it leaves the transition at the end of the year, as well as agreements with others to ensure post-Brexit growth is not entirely dependent on Europe.

Investors should focus on identifying companies that may become, in essence, new "national champions," which will benefit from state assistance to move production—and revenue—back to their home countries.

The UK and US, for example, are now talking about new industrial policies, when state intervention has been taboo for years. These could involve tax incentives to encourage development of certain industries and the return of manufacturing firms, particularly in critical global supply chains. This is especially true for aerospace, defence and high technology. Biotech and pharmaceutical companies may get additional government support to develop and produce life-saving drugs.

This is far from the only area in which we should expect to see change. Coronavirus could accelerate income inequality

within developed countries. The workers hit most immediately by the lockdowns were hourly waged service workers in restaurants, bars, hotels and shops, who had already suffered from very weak wage growth over the last decade. A trend towards bigger, better-capitalised companies may accelerate, presenting workers with fewer employment opportunities and limiting their ability to negotiate higher wages. Rising income inequality will likely exacerbate the savings glut that has kept interest rates, inflation and growth low over the past decade. Higher market concentration will create winners and losers in technology, healthcare and retail.

We will also have to learn to live with previously unimaginable levels of government debt. Borrowing to prevent a depression now may weigh on growth ahead as less capital is available to finance investment. Major central banks have made it clear that interest rates will be very low for the foreseeable future.

To find yield, investors will have to move out along the risk curve and buy lower-rated debt. Governments are likely to pay for the crisis response with higher taxes. Given the precarious state of personal finances in the UK and the US, those governments are more likely to raise corporate taxes, which lowers investment, productivity, potential growth and therefore corporate earnings.

A larger role for the state in our lives may not be all bad. Many workers today are grateful for the legacies of past crises: The NHS in the UK was created after world wars, and social security in the US emerged from the Great Depression. These new social programmes protected the most vulnerable and created new opportunities for investors. Now, as then, the trick is being able to adapt to the new rules of the game.



The punter: Andy Davis Bring it on home

Over the past few months, millions have switched to working from home. Most probably expect this to be a temporary change, but what if a return to the office remains impractical for the foreseeable future?

With public transport increasingly overcrowded, home working one or two days a week was becoming more common in any case. But Covid-19 restrictions are accelerating a lot of changes that were already happening in our societies and economies—a move away from office-based work feels like one of them.

This would have big implications for property markets and those who invest in them. If employers conclude they can keep many staff working largely from home for the long term, demand for office space will drop, especially in expensive city districts that depend on people commuting. That would drive down rents and capital values, hurting office landlords, which include many pension funds and insurance companies. These large investors have moved heavily into prime office property over the past decade as yields on their bond investments have fallen. Serious problems in this market would be a nasty blow.

Alongside retail space—already in deep trouble—offices are a major element of property as an asset class, and depressed returns here will make it harder for pension schemes to generate

the income they need to pay pensions and for insurers to hold down premiums and cover claims.

Banks will also be concerned. Landlords depend on debt finance to fund their investments and banks provide a lot of the commercial mortgages used to purchase office properties. It is also worth remembering that historically, commercial property lending has tended to get banks into bigger trouble than most other things because the market is so cyclical. A structural decline in demand for office space would hit banks' balance sheets, forcing write-offs and provisions that will limit their capacity to make new loans. This is exactly the problem the government and financial regulators are now trying to head off.

More home working is also likely to affect residential property markets, especially in big cities where commuting will decline. Instead, I would expect to see demand for properties in smaller towns and rural areas benefit as more people take the opportunity to live further from cities for a better quality of life. By the same token, larger homes that can easily accommodate offices for several occupants are likely to be sought after.

This is all speculation, of course. But it is hard to escape the suspicion that many working lives have changed for good—and with them, our investment landscape.

We're working together against domestic abuse until women and children are safe

Women's Aid is a grassroots federation working together to provide life-saving services in England and build a future where domestic abuse is not tolerated

Women's Aid is the national charity working to end domestic abuse against women and children. We're a federation of nearly 180 organisations providing local lifesaving services to women and children across the country. Every year our support services – including our Live Chat instant messenger service, demand for which has risen by 56% during lockdown - help thousands of women and children to cope, escape and recover from abuse.

Staying home has been essential during the pandemic. But for women and children experiencing domestic abuse, home is a not a place of safety. We have received harrowing reports from survivors isolated with a perpetrator during lockdown. Women are telling us that abuse is escalating and that perpetrators are manipulating lockdown measures to exert control.

Women's Aid and our national network of members are needed more than ever. But our life-saving services faced funding crisis before COVID 19; the pandemic could not have landed at a worse time. Our survey of local domestic abuse services in March demonstrated why COVID 19 is now the 'perfect storm' of challenges – from staff shortages and illness, to lost income and practical difficulties in supporting women and children remotely. A shocking 84% of domestic abuse providers have needed to reduce or cancel one or more of their critical services during the pandemic. Demand for refuges was sky-high before COVID 19 and now, at a time when they are needed more than ever, the number of refuge vacancies has halved.

Women and children living in fear across the country need action. Women's Aid is calling for commitment at the highest levels of government to prevent harm and protect and support survivors. £27 million in emergency funding over the next five months has been welcome. But for frontline women's charities it has been a messy, stressful and bureaucratic process at a time of crisis. A guarantee of a secure funding future for our sector is now essential;

before COVID 19 Women's Aid estimated that at least £393 million per year for women's specialist domestic abuse services is needed to ensure no survivor is turned away.

The return of the Domestic Abuse Bill is a landmark moment. COVID 19 has demonstrated why we need a transformation in the future response to domestic abuse. The Bill must go beyond criminal justice and deliver the changes survivors' need – from safe housing to welfare reform, the family courts and support for children. Most urgently, the law must deliver equal access to protection and support for migrant women, who face the greatest barriers to safety. During this time of national crisis no survivor should be turned away. We look forward to working with all MPs to ensure this legislation truly delivers a future free from fear, and free from abuse.



Nicki Norman
Acting Chief Executive, Women's Aid
Federation of England

women's aid
until women & children are safe

[womensaid.org.uk](https://www.womensaid.org.uk)

Covid-19: a policy symposium

We are all affected by coronavirus, but some people have to decide what to do about it. Here we ask ministers and mayors about the problems they face and the actions they are taking—and we also ask their scrutineers, in committee chairs and on the opposition benches, about which problems they fear could be missed



Jobs

Mims Davies
Minister for Employment

Mid-May saw the return of some workers to newly reopened sectors of our economy, as we begin the next phase of our response. Maintaining links between employers and employees makes that return to work possible. The challenge for people not working right now is staying connected to the jobs market. Once engagement slips, people often find themselves drifting away from the world of work, making it harder to get back into the job club. They can suffer a loss of confidence, feel out of touch and their professional network can go quiet.

That's why, as part of the unprecedented action we're taking to support families, workers and businesses, a key focus is on keeping people involved in the jobs market. The furlough scheme does that by keeping people on payroll, meaning businesses have workforces ready and available as lockdown eases. And through our targeted employment campaign and Skills Toolkit, we're supporting people to keep learning and improving their employability for the future.

On top of that, the National Careers Service has never been more important—offering advice on next steps, from training opportunities to pivoting into a different sector. If people can stay meaningfully connected to the jobs market, it will help us in the long term as we prepare to restart the economy and get the country back up and running at full speed.

Ed Davey
Acting leader of the Liberal Democrats

The coronavirus crisis is leaving thousands of families facing financial hardship. We must ensure no one is left behind. Taxi drivers, hairdressers, cleaners, childcare providers and millions more self-employed people have seen their incomes evaporate as people rightly stay at home to save lives. They desperately need the government to support them. That's why the Liberal Democrats campaigned for a package for the self-employed that is as generous as that for employees, and our pressure paid off.

The Self-Employment Income Support Scheme is a lifeline for over two million people. However, it only covers three months' worth of lost earnings and excludes far too many people, including those who recently became self-employed. Just as for employees, the government must extend this scheme until October, and expand it to cover the many self-employed people who are currently excluded. The self-employed have waited far too long for this support. They must not see it snatched away too early.



Social care

Helen Whately
Minister for Care

We are doing everything we can to ensure that the social care sector, its incredible workforce and all those who receive care have the support they need during this unprecedented global outbreak. My thoughts are with all those who have lost a loved one to coronavirus. Every death from this virus is a tragedy. I'd also like to thank all care workers for their compassion, expertise and commitment.

We have a comprehensive action plan for social care, ensuring workers on the frontline get the protective equipment they need, with millions of items delivered since the outbreak began. We are providing £3.2bn to local authorities to help them deal with the impacts of the pandemic on public services, including adult social care, and a further £600m Infection Control Fund to reduce transmission of coronavirus in care homes.

In addition, the NHS will ensure each care home has a named clinical contact, providing better access to clinical advice through weekly check-ins to review patients, as well as offering fast-track support for staff and supporting them with equipment and medication.

Philippa Whitford
SNP Health Spokesperson

Ten years of austerity have taken their toll and neither the health nor social care systems were in a fit state to face the onslaught of the coronavirus crisis. The sight of Italy's health system being overwhelmed led to an initial focus on hospital and critical care capacity but, as the lockdown reduces the number of new cases, the real frontline is now in the community, among frail elderly people relying on home care or living in care homes.

Scotland has provided free personal care for many years, and integration of health and social care is Scottish government policy, but this crisis has shown just how far we still have to go. It was shocking to realise that some care homes had struggled with Covid-19 outbreaks for weeks without seeking help, even from their GPs.

But the epidemic is now breaking down barriers that would normally take years to climb over. Project teams are working with energy and creativity to understand the challenges and establish support networks involving hospital, community and social care staff. Maybe, by the end of this crisis, we can finally achieve real integration of health and social care.



Cities

Andy Street
Mayor of the West Midlands

The West Midlands was very quick through the curve and felt the tragic impact of coronavirus early on. The fact that we are a dense urban area with strong transport links and many multi-generational households contributed significantly to this.

However, since the lockdown was imposed, the people of the region have shown remarkable responsibility and determination, and our rate of infection and deaths has fallen substantially. A huge thank you must go to hospital trusts, which have done a remarkable job managing demand—so much so that our 4,000-bed temporary Nightingale Hospital has not had to admit one patient.

Now the big challenge is how we begin to reboot our previously well-performing economy without risking a second wave and undoing all the hard work. An Economic Contingency Group containing business leaders, trade unions, central government representatives and bankers has been established, which I chair on a weekly basis, and this group will work with the West Midlands Combined Authority and local councils to draw up a recovery plan tailored specifically to the region.

We will of course need central government support to aid our economic bounce-back, but regions know their economies better than anyone, and we should be allowed to plot and lead our own recoveries.

Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London

Covid-19 has tested us unlike anything for over 70 years. It has exposed the inequality in our society and deep flaws in our economy, with those from deprived communities being hit hardest by this terrible virus. We're going to have to re-imagine how we operate as a city in order to get through this pandemic and build a better future afterwards.

Continued social distancing requires a fundamental change in how we get around our city. Our new Streetspace plan aims to transform London, enabling walking and cycling in a way never seen before in our history and ensuring our recovery is clean, green and sustainable.

From City Hall, we've ensured over 1,000 rough sleepers have been able to safely self-isolate, and launched a crowdfunding initiative to help Londoners support struggling local businesses. But this crisis will require long-term intervention from the government to protect people's livelihoods.



Domestic violence

Victoria Atkins
Minister for Safeguarding
and Vulnerability

Everyone has been affected by the outbreak of Covid-19 and the measures taken to control it, including lockdown. These measures have been absolutely essential. I know, however, that victims of domestic abuse will have had frightening experiences while trapped in their homes with the perpetrators.

We have been determined to provide as much support as we can to those who need it. From the #YouAreNotAlone campaign guiding victims to the support available, to boosting funding for helplines, chat rooms and frontline charities, while continuing to drive the Domestic Abuse Bill through parliament, we have prioritised helping people who are living in fear in their homes.

There is no excuse for abuse. To any victim of domestic abuse I want you to know that we are here to help and you are not alone.

Christine Jardine
Liberal Democrat Equalities Spokesperson

Saying home and staying safe is not an option for many people.

During this crisis, calls to Refuge's national domestic abuse helpline have increased almost 50 per cent and the service's website traffic has shot up 150 per cent.

In the first three weeks of lockdown, 16 people lost their lives to domestic violence.

The need to act could not be more pressing. I led a cross-party group of MPs who pressed the home secretary on the need for the government to pay for empty hotels for those at risk, for local authorities to have ring-fenced funding for refugees and support services and to lift the "stay at home" rule for those at risk.

Some progress has been made but support remains piecemeal. The same applies to the Domestic Abuse Bill. The UK must enshrine in law the Istanbul Convention, a human rights treaty on preventing and combatting domestic abuse, and guarantee support for all survivors—particularly children and young people for whom witnessing domestic abuse can be a lifelong trauma, and for migrant women, who should feel secure that reporting violence will not risk their immigration status.



Universities

Robert Halfon
Chair, Education Committee

There has been a sharp focus on the impact of Covid-19 on our schools, but we must not forget the consequences for our higher education students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

A-Level cancellations, disruption to outreach programmes, a lack of access to online learning and finance problems all add to the risk of disadvantaged people not being able to climb the education ladder of opportunity.

There is now a chance to rethink the model and design of degrees offered by our universities. Funding should be conditional on meeting skills needs. Degrees need a sharper focus on work experience and skills, and institutions should link up with further education and university technical colleges. Degree apprenticeships, where students earn while they learn, should be the jewel in the crown of a revamped offering and should make up half of all degrees.

Students embarking on higher education must be sure that they are getting value for money and will have a good chance of quality, skilled graduate employment, with higher education meeting our country's skills needs.

Emma Hardy
Shadow Education Minister

The immediate threat is the widely predicted, but as yet unquantified, drop in international student numbers. This will hit universities' finances, but no one knows exactly how hard.

Instead of underwriting the finances for the year, the government chose instead to bring forward the payment of student tuition fees. This does nothing to address the underlying loss of income in the long term and universities are being forced to set budgets in the dark. This promises only job losses, downsizing and even the potential loss of institutions that are anchors in their communities and will be vital in their training and reskilling.

Cuts may be deeper than necessary in some cases, as those institutions without deep pockets err on the side of caution. The government should ensure this national resource is financially secure and work with those in the sector to prepare a road map out of the current crisis.



Courts

Bob Neill
Chair, Justice Committee

The biggest challenge coronavirus presents for the courts is the backlog of jury trials in the Crown Courts. The very limited resumption announced will only scratch the surface of this. Lengthy delays mean extra strain for victims, defendants and witnesses, and a greater risk of miscarriages of justice as memories may fade or evidence deteriorates.

The government must make an emergency injection of money into the court system, bringing in many more part-time judges (recorders), who have been underused recently, and paying for adaptations to court buildings to ensure social distancing while it is still needed. The courts will need to sit flat out for months to catch up, and that also means more support to keep barristers' chambers and solicitors' firms afloat who do criminal legal aid at a time when their cashflows have been decimated.

Alex Cunningham
Shadow Justice Minister

There were more than one million outstanding cases in criminal courts, family courts, magistrates' courts and tribunals before the Covid-19 crisis struck. That number will have soared throughout the last four months. There are many more in the civil court system.

"Delays mean a greater risk of miscarriages of justice"

These extraordinary figures are the legacy of the courts closure programme, reduced sitting hours, and a shortage of magistrates and translators. Add to that the suspension of many courts as a result of Covid-19 and it is clear the system is in crisis.

The use of virtual courts is part of the answer—but these must guarantee full and proper access to justice for everyone, and not exclude those who do not have the required technology.

The government must halt the closure programme, maximise court sittings in safe environments, urgently recruit more magistrates and guarantee open justice.



For more MP contributions, including on managing the return of sport fixtures, visit www.prospect-magazine.co.uk

THE URGENT NEED TO RENEW REASON

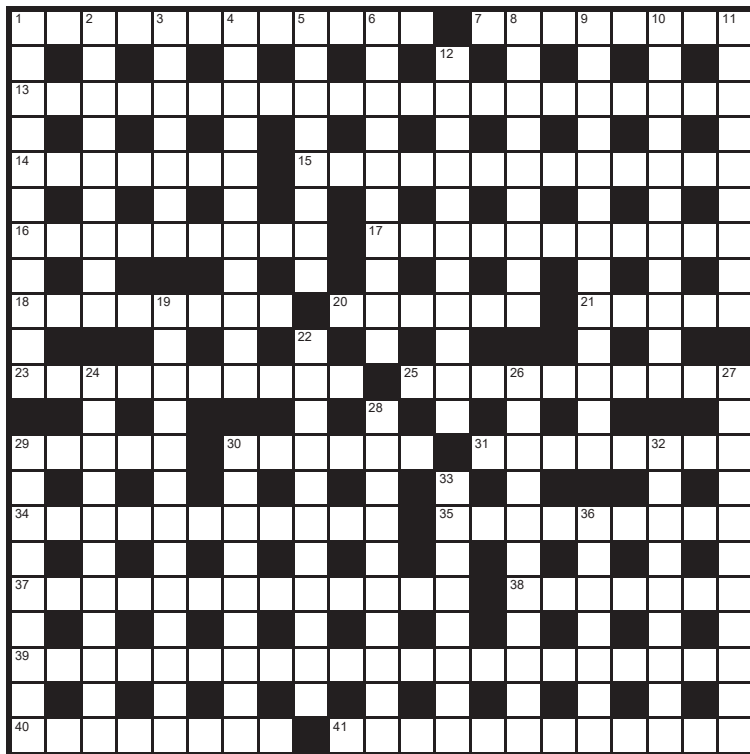
The first step in reviving reason must be, of course, to solve the knotty problems which created the original loss of faith in reason. They were the adoption of an officially fatalistic view of the universe, and the capitulation of the mathematicians when faced with a contradiction in set theory. If time is a kind of space, a fatalistic vision of the universe follows. There was much swallowing of doubts and hesitations, but for a hundred years consensus opinion has deferred to the scientists, accepting their theory of relativity. What we now urgently need is a new theory of relativity which does not have this intensely toxic implication. For nearly a hundred years the mathematicians have treated their artificial version of set theory as if it were holy writ. The consequences have not been as far-reaching as the fatalism of relativity theory, but they have had a subtly insidious effect on mathematics teaching. Mathematics teaching has widely suffered subliminally from a persistent vein of pedantry and artificiality. The result is that it has lost much of the positivity, operational fluidity and self-assurance needed when it is used in science. Scientists and technologists need confident mathematics: but this is just what mathematics has ceased to be.

Solutions exist to both problems, but the subject hierarchies seem to have a vested interest in sticking to their logically defective narratives. The very word 'space' carries associations of freedom. Another technical term for 'dimension' is 'degree of freedom', but we cannot move about in time, either forwards or backwards: we are stuck in The Now. Apologists for Einstein's relativity made much play of its move away from Newton's Absolute Space, but what has been put in its place, is an even more absolute Space-Time. This was, at best, a stop-gap solution. What was needed was a comprehensive epistemological basis for science — one which treats it as an axiom that space itself needs to be explained. The solution to the contradiction in set theory involves recognising that there are two kinds of contradiction, the parallel and the serial. In the serial case the meaning keeps switching between incompatible "dictions".

A similarly absolutist attitude is being maintained in mathematics, where the Official Story is still that Cantor's transfinite sets "exist", even though almost everybody has accepted that the elements of these immense fanciful super-infinities can never be mathematically defined. The hierarchy seem to have forgotten... that the very basis of mathematics' reputation for rigour is — proper definition.

philosophyforrenewingreason.com

The generalist by Didymus



ACROSS

- 1 Early 13th-century book advising women to try to live the strict religious lives of anchoresses (7,5)
- 7 The family on Wimpole Street in Rudolf Besier's play (8)
- 13 Collection of church songs edited by Henry Williams Baker, first published in 1861 (5,7,3,6)
- 14 Alain ..., French film director of *Hiroshima mon amour* and *Last Year at Marienbad* (7)
- 15 A dark and dingy place for an ATM (4,2,3,4)
- 16 The first leaf that sprouts from a germinating seed (9)
- 17 *Filipendula ulmaria* (11)
- 18 An outfit of matching garments (8)
- 20 The three sisters of Greek mythology, Aglaia, Thalia and Euphrosyne (6)
- 21 Log hut covered with earth, built by the Navajo people (5)
- 23 *Guardian's* blogger about crossword who wrote *Two Girls, One on Each Knee: The Puzzling Playful World of the Crossword* in 2013 (4,6)
- 25 City on the River Neckar; its university is Germany's oldest (10)
- 29 A French dance (5)
- 30 Bricklayer's labourer (6)
- 31 Assailed (8)
- 34 Train accidents at Weedon,

both in 1915 and 1951, for instance (11)

- 35 The tenth Savoy opera, subtitled *The Witch's Curse* (9)
- 37 Public park between Clonmel Street and Upper Hatch Street in Dublin, one of the city's "hidden gems" (6,7)
- 38 Economic recovery (7)
- 39 Middle English metrical romance which first appeared in Europe c. 1160 in "aristocratic" French (6,3,12)
- 40 Feather-brains (8)
- 41 The 2008 result of deregulation in the financial industry and the banks' hedge-fund trading (6,6)

DOWN

- 1 One of the sacred books of Hinduism, consisting largely of priestly spells and incantations (7,4)
- 2 Protestant insurgents in the Cévennes who resisted the violence of the Dragonnades after 1685 (9)
- 3 Archaically, loses excess weight (of a hawk) (7)
- 4 County town of County Fermanagh (11)
- 5 Shipping forecast area lying between Lundy and Malin (5,3)
- 6 In *The Faerie Queene*, Braggadocchio's sword (10)
- 8 Trial performances by applicants for acting jobs (9)
- 9 International student awarded
- 10 Pindar's sobriquet (6,5)
- 11 Valerie ..., presenter of *Blue Peter* from 1962 to 1972 (9)
- 12 Brookfield Farm resident played by Tim Bentinck (5,6)
- 19 Originally a French tyre company's publication which systematically surveyed and graded European restaurants (8,5)
- 22 Sweet William or none-so-pretty or Noël Coward's patriotic song of 1941 (6,5)
- 24 A return from Perpignan to Paris, say (5-6)
- 26 Stage and screen actor, noted for his portrayal of Hercule Poirot (5,6)
- 27 US TV sitcom series about Dorothy, Rose, Blanche and Sophia living together and sharing experiences in Miami (6,5)
- 28 In Germany, a bar or restaurant located in the basement of a city hall (10)
- 29 See below (4,5)
- 30 Its TV members include Pike, Godfrey, Jones and Frazer (4,5)
- 32 Characters expressing pleasure or anger in emails (9)
- 33 Shut behind bars (8)
- 36 To the extent that (7)

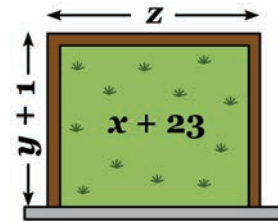
Last month's generalist solutions

Across: 1 Charles Schulz, 8 Cape Cod, 12 Lose the plot, 13 Perpignan, 14 Errhine, 15 Elaeis, 16 Pinole, 18 Ascertained, 19 Scarpetta, 20 In spate, 22 *African Queen*, 25 Marprelate, 28 Hôtels-Dieu, 30 Sprechgesang, 31 Passant, 34 Larceners, 36 Appin Murder, 38 Rosses, 39 Pliant, 40 Albania, 42 Adar Shen, 43 Grimpen Mire, 44 Aldhelm, 45 Knockmealdown
 Down: 1 Culteranismo, 2 Abstracts, 3 Luthier, 4 Steve Race, 5 Culzean Castle, 6 Uitlanders, 7 Ziphios, 8 Carp, 9 Philippoussis, 10 Condotieri, 11 Dunvegan, 17 Sarnie, 21 Arrière-pensée, 23 Croagh Patrick, 24 Subterranean, 26 Rupert's Land, 27 Lehrer, 29 Caravaggio, 31 Pineapple, 32 Andantino, 33 *Gloriana*, 35 Selkirk, 37 Umbonal, 41 Herm

Enigmas & puzzles

Handel's aria

Barry R Clarke



Court composer George Frideric Handel was becoming anxious. The royal court had commissioned a new opera *Lifetime in Lockdown*, but he was having trouble following their guidelines. It was no easy task when the notes had to be 2 metres apart. So Handel decided to get a grip on himself. To sharpen his focus and socially-distance himself from his household, he built a secluded area in his garden. The retreat consists of a rectangular lawn surrounded on three sides by a fence (brown) and on the fourth side by a wall (grey).

The enclosure has area $x + 23$, with dimensions $y + 1$ and z . The values x, y, z are whole numbers greater than one, and their total is equal to the length of the fence (which has negligible thickness). It is also noteworthy that the digital sum of the three numbers x, y, z equals the sum of the digits in their total. (For example, if $x = 27, y = 17, z = 8$ then their digital sum is $2 + 7 + 1 + 7 + 8 = 25$).

What is the area of the enclosure?

Last month's solution

There are 45 possible parallelograms in a main triangle of side length 4. A useful technique for systematic counting would be to divide the parallelograms into their four possible types (1 length $x \times 1$ length, $2 \times 1, 3 \times 1, 2 \times 2$) and perform a count for each. These numbers are 18, 18, 6, and 3, respectively. It is possible to find the general formula for such a count. For a main triangle of side length n , the total number of parallelograms of any size is given by $n(n^2 - 1)(n + 2)/8$. In the present case, we have $n = 4$ and $(4 \times 15 \times 6)/8 = 45$.

How to enter

The generalist prize

The winner receives a copy of *The Mathematics of the Gods and the Algorithms of Men* by Paolo Zellini. Have we invented numbers or do they truly exist? In this engaging cultural history, a professor of mathematics at the University of Rome shows how mathematics is a means to describe and understand reality itself.

Enigmas & puzzles prize

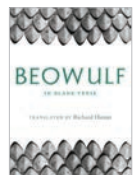
The winner receives a copy of *Beowulf in Blank Verse* translated by Richard Hamer. In this new translation of the Anglo-Saxon epic, Hamer takes a fresh approach to its complex metrical form, helping shed a light on its subtleties, while staying true to the original. "Hwaet!" becomes "Hear!"

Rules

Send your solution to answer@prospect-magazine.co.uk or Crossword/Enigmas, *Prospect*, 2 Queen Anne's Gate, SW1H 9AA. Include your email and postal address. Entries must be received by 3rd July. Winners announced in our August/September 2020 issue.

Last month's winners

The generalist: Roslyn Shapland, Ilkeston
 Enigmas & puzzles: Donald Swift-Hook, Woking
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Brief encounter



Lee Child

Author

ILLUSTRATION BY NICK TAYLOR

What is the first news event you can recall?

The JFK assassination in November 1963. I had just turned nine. I was watching *Take Your Pick!* with Michael Miles, and there was a newflash in part one saying he had been shot, and a second newflash in part two saying he was dead. My parents were moderately anti-American and hysterically anti-Catholic, but even so were still very upset.

What is your most embarrassing moment as a writer?

I had an awkward moment on the radio once. I took a Denver station's call in bed, and heard the DJ say, "After the news I have one of my absolute favourite authors, Lincoln Child... coming up in a minute." I had 60 seconds to figure out how not to embarrass either the DJ or myself. As it happened, I knew Lincoln Child and I knew his books... so for three minutes on Denver radio, I simply impersonated him.

If you could spend a day at one moment in history, what would that be?

The question seems to imply a safe, swift and certain return, so I would choose something really extreme in its intensity—maybe Stalingrad in December 1942.

What is your favourite quotation?

Franz Kafka: "The meaning of life is that it ends." Appropriately dark and sardonic, and therefore consoling in some moods, but equally I take it to mean this ain't a dress rehearsal.

Are things getting better or worse?

There's no conclusion other than getting worse. I grew up in a stable postwar democracy, with full employment, moderate politics, a functioning cradle-to-grave welfare state, dread diseases conquered, no bombs falling on my house, no 4am knocks on the door, and a superb free education from the age of five until I no longer wanted it. No generation in history ever had all that before, and later generations are seeing it taken away, little by little, and squalidly.

If you were given £1m to spend on other people, what would you spend it on and why?

Random acts of kindness: you see an old lady struggling with her wheelchair, you push her to the store and buy her an electric model. You rent a suite at the Savoy and invite the homeless in for a soak in the tub. And so on. Whatever increases the sum of human happiness. Might take a week. You could buy a copy of *The Big Issue* with the last couple of quid.

What do you most regret?

A cowardly hiring decision. When I was at Granada TV, the responsibility to choose on-screen announcers fell to me. One audition tape opened on a very tight shot of a woman's face. She looked great on the screen and her voice was lovely. The camera pulled back a little. Still great. More. She was sitting in a car, looking out the window. Weird, but OK. She was still great. In fact she could be the one. Then the camera pulled back more. She was a Thalidomide victim. I foresaw minor difficulties operating her mic with no arms, but mostly I foresaw objections from management. I put her in the discard pile. I should have fought for her. I have never forgiven myself. Then it got worse. I hired a woman from Trinidad, previously a flight attendant. She went on to present a small local programme. One Christmas she went home to Trinidad to stay with her mother and sister. Local robbers heard rumours of the rich TV star from Britain, broke in and killed all three.

What would people be surprised to know about you?

I like ironing. I hate Mozart. I have never read Jane Austen.

What have you changed your mind about?

Practically everything. Some things because of time-bought perspective—the best play I ever saw, the best guitarist of the 1960s—and others because of new information—Neanderthal society, the content of the universe. The last 50 years have seen a tsunami of research on everything, and anyone who hasn't changed their mind isn't paying attention.

What's the perfect book to read in a crisis?

Probably a thriller, as the genre trades on the reader's desire to make order out of chaos. Probably one of mine. Probably my latest hardcover.

Can you teach someone to be a writer?

No. You can pass on hints and tips and industry-insider shortcuts, but the only way to learn is to read for 40 years. Plus, the only way a text can have a beating heart is for it to be the organic work of one mind. I think writing courses and MA degrees are procrastination techniques. Don't get it right, get it written. **12**

Lee Child's latest Jack Reacher book "*Blue Moon*" is out now from Bantam. He is a judge for this year's Booker Prize

UK Ports: A shared agenda



01 Deliver free ports to drive exports and create jobs

Drive the creation of free ports to attract new investment and create new jobs where they are most needed. Many ports such as Port Talbot and Hull offer ideal locations for new manufacturing and can help increase Britain's exports.

02 Support resilient and sustainable supply chains

Humber ports can help businesses avoid Brexit disruption at Dover. By increasing the amount of EU trade using Humber ports we can reduce the number of HGVs on Britain's roads, improving safety and reducing CO2 to help tackle climate change.

03 Make sure more businesses are ready for Brexit

An insufficient number of businesses trading with the EU are equipped to deal with customs procedures. A major campaign is needed to promote awareness about what businesses need to do and provide simplified guidance.

04 Give businesses the best access to global markets

Help businesses to trade and increase exports by prioritising investment in transport links to ports and make sure ports can grow. The Port of Southampton is the UK's number one export port so making sure it can continue to offer the best access to global markets is vital for our economy.

05 Build a stronger vision for trade

The UK needs a bolder vision for trade and exports to rally behind. A comprehensive review of Government policy is needed to make sure the nation is equipped to deliver ambitious goals by promoting skills, sustainability and innovation.

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A brighter way



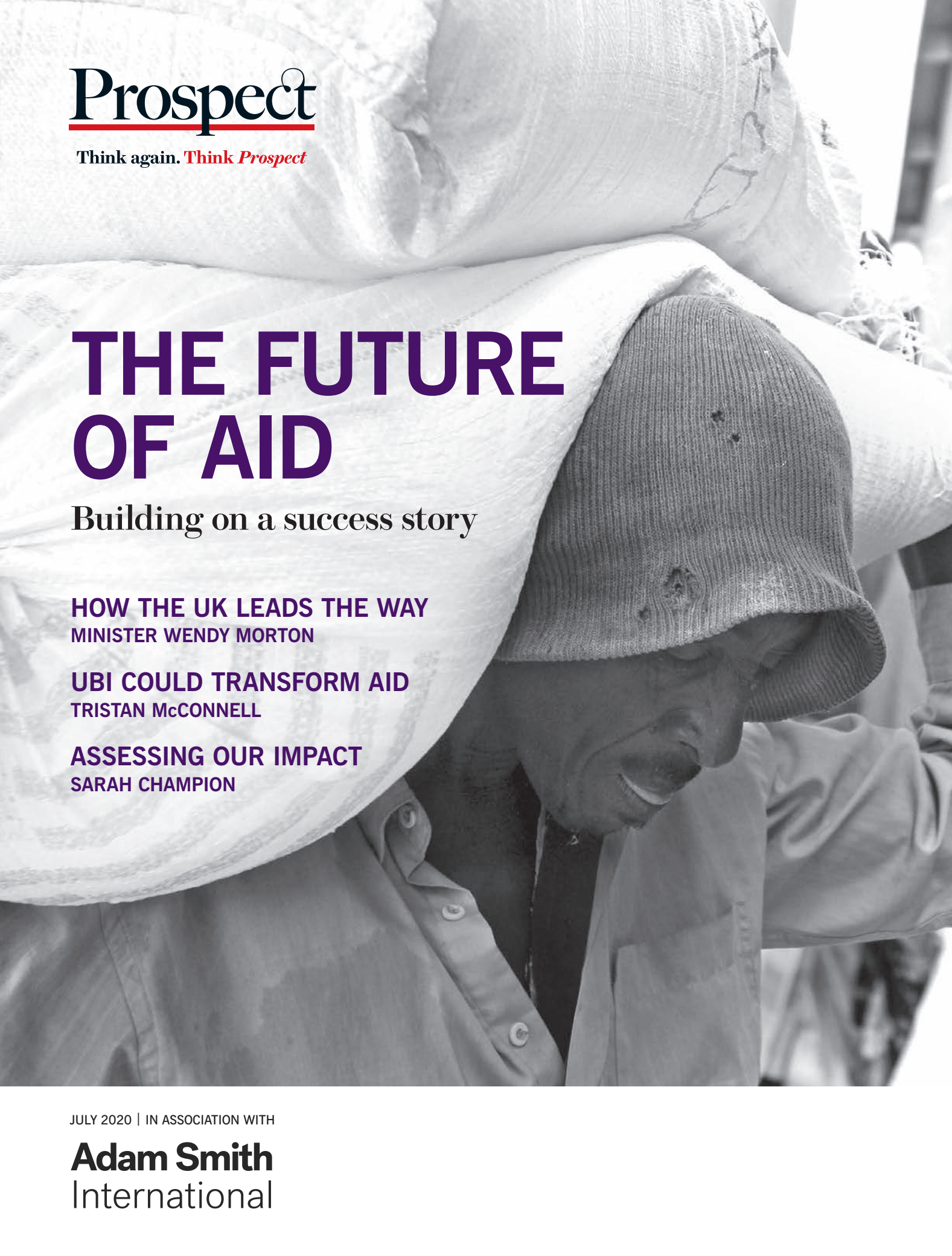
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FOR OUR REPORT
ON AID ►**

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THE FUTURE OF AID

Building on a success story

HOW THE UK LEADS THE WAY

MINISTER WENDY MORTON

UBI COULD TRANSFORM AID

TRISTAN McCONNELL

ASSESSING OUR IMPACT

SARAH CHAMPION

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This report forms part of *Prospect's* work on overseas aid. For more information on this report and our wider programme of activity please email:

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AID AND THE PANDEMIC

Covid-19 will dramatically reshape international development

STEVE BLOOMFIELD DEPUTY EDITOR, *PROSPECT*

One of the curious aspects of the first few months of the global coronavirus pandemic is that the virus has spread further and faster through the developed world. Countries in the global south, with crumbling healthcare systems, weaker sanitation, and poorer populations and governments, have—so far—not experienced the same level of cases or deaths.

That is likely to change. As it does, the question of how the rich world helps the poor deal with the crisis will be vital.

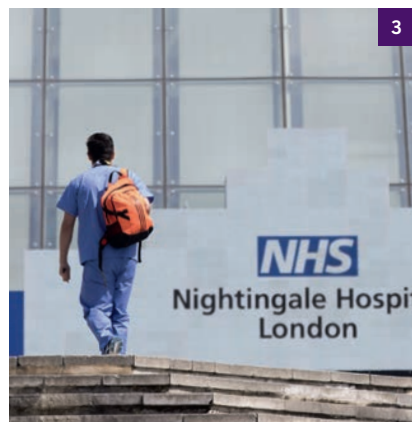
Debt relief needs to be at the top of the list—aid given with one hand cannot be taken with the other. And when—if—a vaccine is successfully developed, they will need it just as badly as we will. It is reassuring, therefore, to hear a minister argue, as Wendy Morton does on p2, that “no one is safe until we are all safe.”

Coronavirus will also have an impact on the future of aid. The budget of the Department for International Development (Dfid) will dramatically reduce. Even if the government sticks to its promise—and the law—to spend 0.7 per cent of GDP on overseas development assistance, it will be 0.7 per cent of a smaller pot. Donations have also begun to dry up. Aid agencies will have less money—many are already closing country offices and laying off staff.

That makes it all the more important that the aid debate in the coming decade is focused on how aid works, not just on how much is spent. Donors and recipients, international NGOs and local organisations all need to think about whether the model they have followed is still fit for purpose. Cash payments, as Tristan McConnell reports from western Kenya on p5, must be part of the answer. Aid in the 2020s could look very different.



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HOW BRITAIN LEADS THE WAY ON AID

Supporting the world's most vulnerable communities benefits all of us

WENDY MORTON MINISTER FOR THE EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD AND THE AMERICAS

Coronavirus is affecting communities around the world. We do not yet know how profound and far-reaching an effect it will ultimately have. Nevertheless, it is clear that no one is safe until we are all safe.

This pandemic is demonstrating just how interconnected our world is. If we want to lessen the lasting global impact of the virus and help prevent a second wave, we need to make sure the most vulnerable countries can cope.

Right now, there is a bleak outlook for many countries in the developing world, which are experiencing health, humanitarian and economic crises. They face the prospect of much greater hardship for years to come.

As the minister responsible for global health at DfID and the Foreign Office, I have seen how the huge generosity of the British people, and the expertise of our scientists and engineers, is helping lead the global response.

Health experts have identified the weakness of developing countries' health systems as one of the biggest risks in terms of the global spread of the virus. Failing to tackle that leaves the UK and our NHS exposed to future waves of infection.

We are helping to strengthen healthcare systems in the poorest countries, we are supporting the most vulnerable economies with debt relief, and we are researching new vaccines and treatments. So far, we have pledged £744m in total to do this, an investment to make sure we can end this pandemic sooner, thus protecting communities here at home.

Of that funding, £200m is going on emergency humanitarian support to train rapid response teams and medical staff in developing countries to identify and respond to coronavirus. This support will deliver vital medical supplies so that fragile health systems can keep going. It will also provide soap and places where people can wash their hands or stay isolated when needed in refugee camps and the world's poorest communities.

The pandemic also threatens many countries with economic collapse, undoing the significant progress made to reduce global poverty in recent decades. While the UK government has robust and

generous plans in place to protect the British economy, other countries will be less fortunate.

That is why in April the UK helped lead the call among G20 countries to suspend debt service payments from the poorest nations until the end of 2020, creating up to \$12bn of financial breathing space so they can invest in responding to the pandemic. This, along with the £150m we have made available to the International Monetary Fund for debt relief, will help developing countries direct more of their own money into efforts to fight the virus.

As the prime minister has said, the way to end the pandemic for good is through a vaccine—this is the greatest shared endeavour of our lifetime. That is why the UK is the biggest supporter of the international vaccine research run by the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, pledging £250m of UK aid. British scientists are working with international partners, and clinical trials are already under way in the UK with support from our government's vaccine taskforce.

Ending the pandemic and its threats to the UK will only be possible if a vaccine is available to everyone. I am proud that the UK has led efforts with the World Health Organisation and countries including

France, Germany, Malaysia and South Africa to agree that any new vaccine is made available around the world.

The anniversary of the birth of Edward Jenner, the British physician seen as the father of modern vaccines, was marked on 17th May. So it was therefore fitting that the UK virtually hosted the Global Vaccine Summit on 4th June, where we and other nations came together to secure the future of global vaccinations through Gavi, the global Vaccine Alliance.

We had already announced the equivalent of £330m a year for the next five years for Gavi, which will immunise 75m children in the world's poorest countries against diseases such as measles, typhoid and pneumonia.

The summit was led by the prime minister, bringing together other nations, major donors and pharmaceutical companies to raise the funds Gavi needs to vaccinate children worldwide against these devastating diseases, and in turn strengthen healthcare systems.

My department's priorities in this crisis are to save lives, make economies more resilient and prevent future waves of infection. Working together to tackle coronavirus is the only way we will ultimately defeat it.



MORE VOICES, BIG AND SMALL

Greater transparency is needed to make sure we can help those who need it most

PREET KAUR GILL SHADOW INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT SECRETARY



Nightingale Hospital at the ExCel Centre in London. The UK should unashamedly promote universal health coverage around the world

The great global challenges we face today of extreme poverty, inequality, the climate crisis, and of course Covid-19, can only be overcome by working together across borders to share knowledge, expertise and resources.

In responding to these issues, we must resist the pull of inward-looking politics and policies such as President Donald Trump's announcement that the United States will end funding to the World Health Organisation during a global pandemic. Bowing to this rhetoric risks a scramble for resources that will undo decades of life-changing and life-saving progress across the global south.

Dfid is internationally renowned and a vital component of the UK's international presence since its creation by Labour in 1997. For much of its life, it has had an unapologetic vision to help the world's poorest and most vulnerable and promote a world that is better, safer and fairer for all. However, in recent years this vision has been eroded and, due to the aid budget increasingly being used to top up the budgets of other government departments, Dfid's spend is now lower in real terms than it was in 2013.

As Shadow Secretary of State for International Development, I want to return the UK to a leadership role on

international development and to use our influence and global standing to provide space for the voices of the most vulnerable and marginalised to be heard, to speak out to protect universal human rights and to promote public services. We are rightly proud of the NHS in the UK and should unashamedly promote universal health coverage around the world.

The work of the department must be the result of collaboration, working with a wide range of partners. This transcends international and multilateral institutions to make sure we involve actors at the national, regional and local levels. Working with, and providing support to, actors big and small, especially those with unique knowledge and specialisms, will help improve the effectiveness of our interventions and support. These organisations have firsthand knowledge of the experiences of communities across the world—they understand what is working, and just as importantly, what is not. That is why my first act in this post was to ask for evidence from activists and individuals, trade unions, large and small international NGOs and movements, to better understand the impact of Covid-19.

When UK aid is spent well, it has the power to change people's lives for the better but, increasingly, it is becoming more difficult to assess its impact because

of a lack of transparency over where aid is being spent. In 2015, the government's UK Aid Strategy set out to ensure every department spending aid scored "good" or "very good" in the Aid Transparency Index by 2020. This year, only three met this target. Dfid comfortably came top of the table. We need this transparency to scrutinise, learn from and improve the way aid is being spent.

UK aid should be being used to support governments and the people of developing countries. While the government talks a good game most of the time, it set aside more than £15m of UK aid for a one-day trade summit in London earlier this year—during which it made commercial deals worth billions related to fossil fuels. If we want to deliver a better world and tackle the climate crisis then we cannot continue with business as usual.

The Labour Party recognises the importance of development delivered by an independent, properly resourced Dfid as a key part of the United Kingdom's foreign policy. I will work with the government to ensure Dfid is in the best position to lead global efforts to tackle the immediate emergency of coronavirus, and to put people before profit in its work to tackle the root causes of global poverty, inequality and the climate crisis.

UK AID AT A CROSSROADS: WHICH WAY AHEAD FOR GLOBAL BRITAIN?

We must not let Covid-19 spell the end for Britain's reputation for excellence in foreign aid



Jonathan Pell
Chief Executive Officer
Adam Smith International

For some time, the UK's international development sector has been at a crossroads. All parties at the 2019 election committed to spending 0.7% of GNI on international development, and as a result the debate on the future of aid had moved on to who spends UK aid, on what, and how this is in Britain's national interest. The Integrated Review—postponed but still vital—should determine the answers to these questions, with a focus on the future of Dfid.

Covid-19 has, however, re-focused attention on UK aid expenditure. With UK GNI falling fast, the 0.7% will fall too, which is of course exactly what the 0.7% commitment was designed for and, indeed, why it works. We spend more on aid as a nation when times are good; and less when our national income falls.

Ministers and civil servants face a complex dilemma: how to meet the immediate humanitarian demands of the pandemic while maintaining as many development programmes across a range of sectors and countries as possible? How, at the same time, to support the vast array of Dfid delivery partners—NGOs and specialist companies (small, large, British and foreign), charities, universities, and multilateral organisations—to survive this harsh new economic reality?

While GNI may rebound quickly in 2021 if domestic recovery plans are effective and further outbreaks of Covid-19 are avoided, how the government decides to apportion the required cuts to expenditure in the coming months will shape UK aid for years to come. Done well, and the UK's aid sector—with world-class British expertise at its heart—will be a key contributor to the success of the future Global Britain agenda. Done badly, and Britain's development organisations may disappear, leaving all but a small number of giant, foreign-owned companies.

So far, the UK's response to Covid-19 in developing countries has been mainly as contributor to the international response, as evidenced by big-ticket funding pledges to multilaterals and funds such as Gavi, the vaccine alliance. Prioritising international co-operation and the search for a vaccine in the context of a global pandemic is understandable. We need the WHO and we need Gavi. It has, however, given rise to earlier and unanswered questions of whether or not using UK aid to fund multilaterals provides the scrutiny, agility, value for money and national interest the British taxpayer expects, when compared with the standards and performance of bilateral suppliers.

In smaller but still important ways, the UK's suppliers—those organisations that implement UK aid programmes—are also playing a valuable role in the 'primary response' to Covid-19 overseas and moreover have the breadth of expertise required to deal with the many economic, social and governance challenges Covid-19 has brought to the fore. Yet, like many other organisations, these suppliers

are vulnerable to the pandemic's economic consequences. So the assistance offered by the Cabinet Office and aid-spending departments is welcome in weathering the downturn and the easing of burdensome financial and contractual measures introduced after Dfid's 2017 Supplier Review should remain in place. Additionally, dialogue and a spirit of partnership between UK development practitioners, through British Expertise International, and senior Dfid staff, has improved significantly. This crisis has presented an opportunity for these new found working practices to be developed further, but with the inevitable cuts to come and the rumour mill churning, the sector is unsure of what the future holds both financially and operationally.

There are three important actions the government should take to ensure British international development expertise is supported through the downturn, and is in the best possible health to drive UK aid and the Global Britain agenda.

“DFID CAN LEARN FROM THE POSITIVE DIALOGUE THAT THIS CRISIS HAS BROUGHT ABOUT WITH ITS SUPPLIERS”

Firstly, Dfid should increase the involvement of UK suppliers—both NGOs and specialist firms—in the 'primary response' to Covid-19. Health, humanitarian aid, education, logistics, and resilience are all fields in which Britain's international development community excels, and the government should broaden its response beyond multilateral funding to make sure this expertise is utilised.

Secondly, the government should strengthen its focus now on support to long-term economic recovery. This will ensure that much of the good work already being done by Dfid's British delivery partners on issues such as combating corruption, strengthening infrastructure and energy access, encouraging economic development, bringing stability to fragile states, improving girls' education and tackling the climate emergency, can survive budget cuts and continue to deliver results in our national interest.

Finally, Dfid can learn from the positive dialogue that this crisis has brought about with its suppliers. The sector as a whole feels more like a partner to Dfid than at any time since the 2017 Supplier Review, and the current collaborative rapport should form the backbone of our future working relationship.

This crisis will end, but we must all work together to ensure that when it does, the UK's reputation for excellence in international development survives.

Adam Smith
International

THE GREAT EXPERIMENT

A case study from Kenya shows how unconditional cash payments could transform aid

TRISTAN McCONNELL FREELANCE WRITER AND FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT BASED IN KENYA

The seventh of every month is a joyful date for the people of Magawa, a diffuse village lost in the lushness of rural western Kenya, which lacks electricity, paved roads and mains water. The villagers' phones ping in unison telling them that another instalment of £17 has been transferred to their accounts. It's been this way for four years and will continue for another eight because the villagers are participants in the world's largest-scale, longest-term study of universal basic income (UBI).

UBI has been an increasingly fashionable dream across the west since the financial crisis, especially as austerity and anxieties about the automation of jobs have intensified. And recently the idea of "money for nothing" has taken a temporary step towards reality, through schemes such as furloughing in the UK, which compensates workers who have been forced to down tools by Covid-19. But the huge debts that saddle western treasuries after even a few months of such arrangements underline how considerable the financial obstacles in the developed world remain.

By contrast, in poorer parts of the world, such as Magawa, unconditional payments are not only affordable for aid agencies, but also attenuate even more urgent needs.

The great experiment is to work out whether providing every member of a community with an unconditional baseline income, irrespective of their personal financial situation, will more effectively alleviate poverty than traditional aid. The answer could upend the entire development industry, challenging high operation costs and removing the need for armies of often western experts with their salaries and allowances.

The idea of universal basic income—everyone getting the same amount of money, to do with as they will—long predates the recent fashion. It has made periodic intellectual resurfacings through the centuries, from Thomas More and Thomas Paine to JS Mill and Bertrand Russell, Milton Friedman and JK Galbraith. Experiments with forms of basic income have been conducted in Canada, Finland, Namibia, Spain and the US. In 2016, Switzerland held a national vote on whether to give every citizen a monthly "unconditional basic income" (the Swiss declined), but nothing as comprehensive as this Kenyan project has been tried before.

Four years ago US charity Give Directly began a 12-year, £26m programme involving 20,500 people in 195 villages in Kenya's Siaya County, on the edge of Lake Victoria, and Bomet County, in the Rift Valley. The group's four founders—all post-graduate economics students when they began working on what was to become Give Directly—have drawn an eclectic bunch of backers including Google, Ikea, the Omidyar Network, George Soros's Open Society Foundations, the Global Innovation Fund, USAID and private donors. The large-scale randomised controlled trial in western Kenya is continually evaluated by a team of researchers from Innovations for Poverty Action, University of California San Diego, Princeton and MIT, among them Abhijit Banerjee who, alongside his wife Esther Duflo, won last year's Nobel Prize in economics.

"Cash should be the benchmark in the aid sector," says Michael Faye, Give Directly Co-Founder and President. "If an intervention is not more effective than cash on the desired outcome, then what are we doing? We should never be doing worse than cash."

Traditional development aid rests on the uncomfortable paternalistic conviction that the wealthy who give know better than the poor who receive (too often known as "beneficiaries" in the self-congratulatory jargon of many charities). "The decision of how to allocate resources is at the core of the aid sector. But first, shouldn't we ask who gets to decide?" asks Faye.

Poverty in Kenya runs deep and wide in both urban and rural areas. Roughly a third of the country's 50m people survive on less than £23 a month, an existence made more difficult by increasingly common climatic shocks such as droughts or floods, never mind a global pandemic that takes lives, wounds the economy and disrupts markets. Mismanagement, inequality and corruption hobble Kenya's growth and its ability to fairly distribute the national wealth, drawn primarily from agricultural exports and tourism. Foreign aid has long filled the gap between the basic needs of the poorest and the government's ability—or perhaps willingness—to meet them.

Over the years, special interest non-governmental organisations (NGOs) staking a claim over their particular niches have shown up in Magawa offering mosquito nets, secondhand clothing, seeds, school fees and medicine, but none asked what the residents actually wanted, explains Wilfred Aswan, the elected village elder.

"Maybe you don't have shoes, so the donors see you without and bring you shoes, but then, what you really need is school fees," says Aswan, who wears rubber wellies. And while one resident needs school fees, another needs roof repairs ahead of the rainy season, or extra food to cover a bad harvest, or an individual needs one thing today and something different tomorrow. Poor communities, like all communities, are heterogenous, contingent societies with diverse problems requiring specific solutions. Not everyone needs shoes.

"UNCONDITIONAL PAYMENTS ARE NOT ONLY AFFORDABLE FOR AID AGENCIES, BUT ALSO ATTENUATE EVEN MORE URGENT NEEDS"

In the end, what people most often want is money, and the freedom of choice and dignity that comes with it. "You don't need to come and decide for me," says Dennis Otieno, a 39-year-old father of four and participant in the Give Directly project. "It's not for you to tell me what I need."

The emergence of mobile money systems—such as Kenya's ubiquitous, trail-blazing M-Pesa platform—made cash transfers possible and they have recently become the talk of the development industry. Cash can now be sent directly to recipients' handsets, cutting out the various government, NGO and community middlemen who would take their cuts and backhanders or outright steal, undermining a programme's effectiveness. ▶



From left to right: Immaculate Odhiambo, Benter Wandola and Dennis Otieno, residents of Magawa who are participating in charity Give Directly's 12-year UBI programme



PHOTOGRAPHY © TRISTAN MCCONNELL

Cash isn't everything, of course. People need services too: schools, hospitals and markets, electricity, water and roads—the kind of large-scale infrastructure projects that are, rightly, the domain of governments and their creditors and donors and which, in Kenya, have been delivered more consistently in recent years. But a regular, unconditional cash transfer might be the leg-up the poorest need to get their heads above the poverty line for good.

Under the programme, 42 Kenyan villages are receiving 12 years' worth of monthly payments, while a further 80 villages receive two years' worth of monthly payments, and a final cohort of 73 villages receives a single lump sum equivalent to two years' worth of monthly payments. Every willing resident over the age of 18 is eligible for the cash. The figure of 2,250 Kenyan shillings (£17) a month, or 60 pence a day, is based on what the World Bank and Kenya's government estimate a rural Kenyan needs to scrape by. It is intended to contribute to basic needs, not cover all needs.

The choices that people in Magawa have made when handed this no-strings stipend are striking. Most use some of the cash to supplement routine food purchases and school fees, and invest the remainder in longer-term projects or home improvements. Some things, though, are more ephemeral.

For Benter Wandola, a 67-year-old great-grandmother in a hot pink and purple headscarf, the cash has meant a hitherto unimagined freedom from the entrenched patriarchy of rural life in Kenya (and urban life, for that matter).

Her husband, Samson, seems a remarkably enlightened man: a jolly fellow with a solid handshake and a Father Christmas halo of white hair and beard ringing his round face, he ushers me into their home then backs out promising not to interfere with his wife's interview. "She can say whatever she likes!" he calls from the garden.

"WHAT PEOPLE WANT IS CASH—AND THE FREEDOM OF CHOICE AND DIGNITY THAT COMES WITH IT"

The cash transfers are breaking the social bonds that ensure women depend on their husbands because the money is theirs alone. "I no longer have to beg from my husband," Wandola says. She has invested in chickens, dozens of which roam the yard pecking at piles of feed and scratching in the dirt, and has 60 now which she can sell for around £4 each—a shrewd investment that has multiplied her income. Recently she bought a dairy cow of which she is immensely proud and for which she has high hopes, imagining that it and its

offspring will become a legacy for her many children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, whose portraits crowd a wooden dresser in the family sitting room.

She says the cash has made for domestic bliss. “There is happiness in the home now. I don’t need to bother him so much,” she says. “I have more freedom: if I want to go somewhere, I can go, I don’t have to beg from my husband for anything.”

Outside, Samson, grinning broadly as he oversees the cleaning of a broken-down truck’s engine block among the yellow elder and mango trees, appears equally content. Nearby, a pile of framed metal grills lies on the red soil. They will soon become the perimeter cage of a new fish farm, paid for with his own basic income money.

Female emancipation is a remarkable effect of the experiment, but the £17 a month has also super-charged the entrepreneurial spirit of many recipients. The “side hustle” is a mainstay of economic life in the developing world, where one job specialisation is an elusive luxury. Everyone I met in Magawa had a bunch of different things going on. Some might call it “portfolio working,” but they recognise it as the only way to make it in a hard life.

So the village elder, Aswan, is a motorcycle taxi driver, carpenter-for-hire and farmer; Otieno is a college teacher, bar proprietor and sometime charcoal burner; and Immaculate Odhiambo is a fish trader, burgeoning livestock holder and wildcat investor. “I’m aggressive in my investments because my husband has just one job, as a tailor,” she says with a shrug and a smile.

“IN MY LIFE I’VE NEVER EARNED A SALARY, I’VE NEVER KNOWN WHAT I WILL EARN EACH MONTH. NOW I AM ABLE TO PLAN”

On the seventh, when everyone in the village gets their cash, Odhiambo immediately spends £2 on a motorbike taxi ride to the edge of Lake Victoria, and the remaining £15 on whatever fish of whatever size she can get her hands on: tilapia, Nile perch and catfish; some as long as her forearm, others little bigger than her finger. Then she races back to the market, past allotments of maize and stands of pawpaw, to gut, scale and fry the fish with onions and tomatoes and sell them to hungry punters. On a good day she doubles her money, leaving her with more to spend on food, or put into the various informal investment groups of which she is a member.

Every person I spoke to in Magawa had joined a “table banking” savings consortium—commonly known as a “merry-go-round” in Kenya—whereby groups of six to 10 people put the equivalent of £7.50 a month into a pot, each in turn receiving an individual lump sum payout every few months that enables them to invest in a larger project (or, in Odhiambo’s case, pay off another debt run up at a different savings group).

For most, the merry-go-rounds had improved the community spirit and sense of co-operation. “This small money is very important,” says Otieno, the college teacher. “It makes you plan and think ahead. We come together and can easily identify a big project.”

With 10 in his merry-go-round, Otieno has so far received three £75 payouts from his group (named “Ka Dennis” because it first met at his home)—one every 10 months—and has used the money to start projects of his own choosing: a eucalyptus plantation, a sheep

and goat herd, a pig farm. He describes the investments as “a saving scheme for my children’s future.”

Not everyone has been so fortunate, however: Dennis Abagi, a 26-year-old construction day-labourer, complained that having paid his six installments of £7.50 a month he had been stiffed by some members of his six person group and only received £30 instead of £45 when his last turn for a payout came. Nevertheless, Abagi has managed to start a small poultry farm, buy clothes and food for his family and build a simple two-room home with mud walls and a corrugated iron roof. When we meet he is fitting it with a solar lighting system. “It has opened up my mind to saving,” he says. “With cash I can budget.”

Aswan, the village elder, is 43 years old and says: “In my life I’ve never earned a salary, I’ve never known what I will earn each month, so now I am able to plan.”

The behaviour of Magawa’s residents gives the lie to perhaps the most insidious assumption about basic income: that poor people can’t be trusted with money, that they are constitutionally feckless and profligate, that if you give them cash they’ll blow it on booze.

A World Bank survey of research on cash transfers and “temptation goods” in 2014 found that assumption to be “unfounded” and certainly the people of Magawa are not rushing to their local bar on the seventh for a monthly windfall blow-out (in fact, Otieno, whose “Wild Spirit” bar was once a lucrative side hustle, says his income from alcohol sales has been decreasing steadily).

Nor have they changed their daily behaviour, continuing to work for a living, albeit with a financial cushion that provides a little certainty and relief. As Abagi puts it, “Somebody is coming from nowhere and giving you money? Don’t mess up, be serious with it, do something.” ¹²



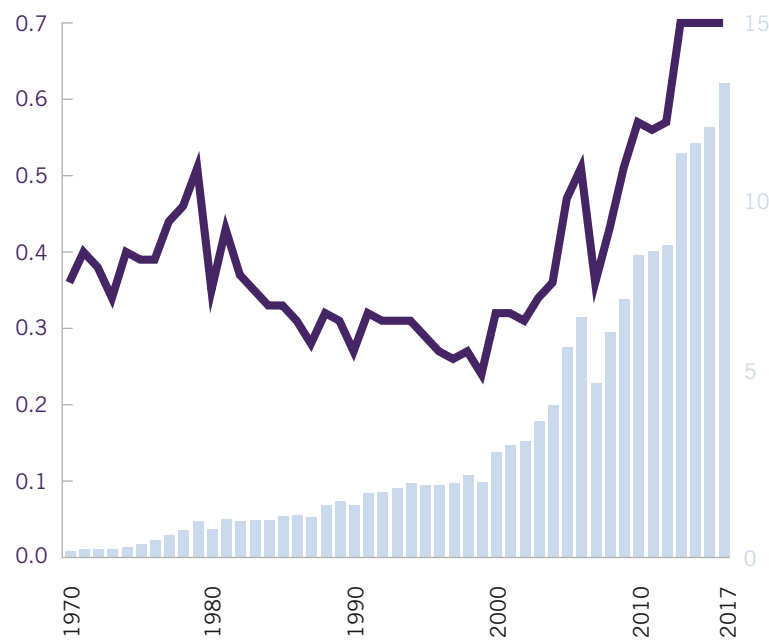
BRITISH INTERNATIONAL AID: IN NUMBERS

Since the 1970s, the UN has called for all rich nations to spend 0.7 per cent of their GDP on overseas development assistance. The UK's journey towards 0.7 has been bumpy—falling after the election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979, rising after 1997 and New Labour, dipping again in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis—but since David Cameron matched Labour's pledge to hit 0.7 after becoming leader of the Conservatives, the target has been met.

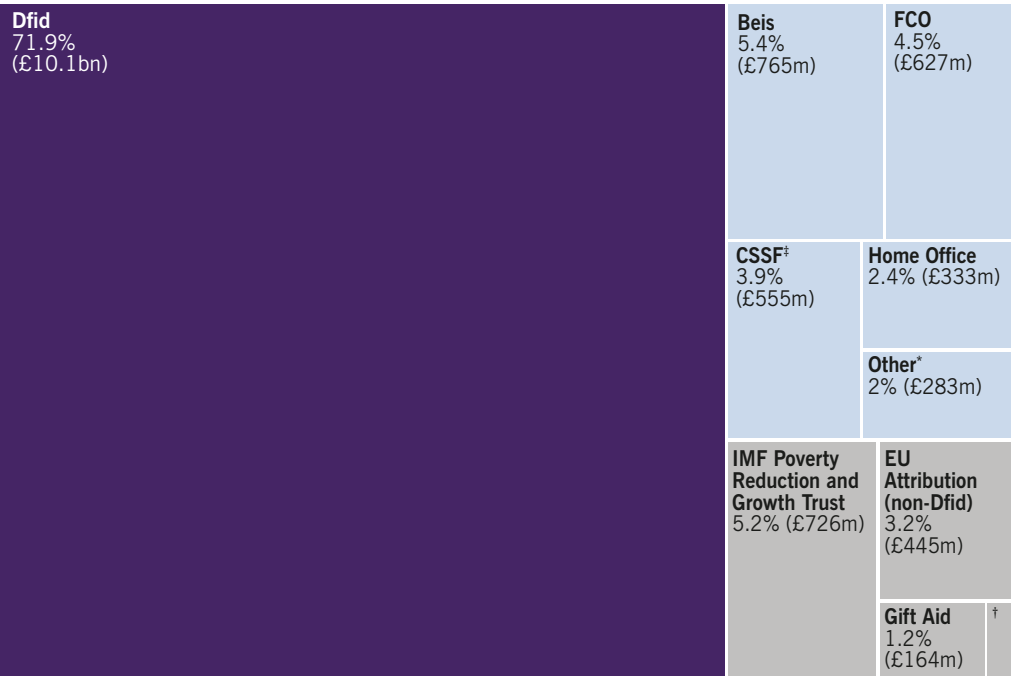
Not all of that aid is spent by Dfid, though. The Conservative government has dramatically increased the amount spent by other departments—and some experts worry that those departments, most notably the foreign office, spend it poorly.

Where the money is spent has also come under increasing scrutiny in recent years. War zones, naturally, feature high on the list: Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia and Yemen are all in the top seven. Old colonial ties also make a difference: more of the UK's spend in Africa is focused on the English-speaking east than the Francophone west.

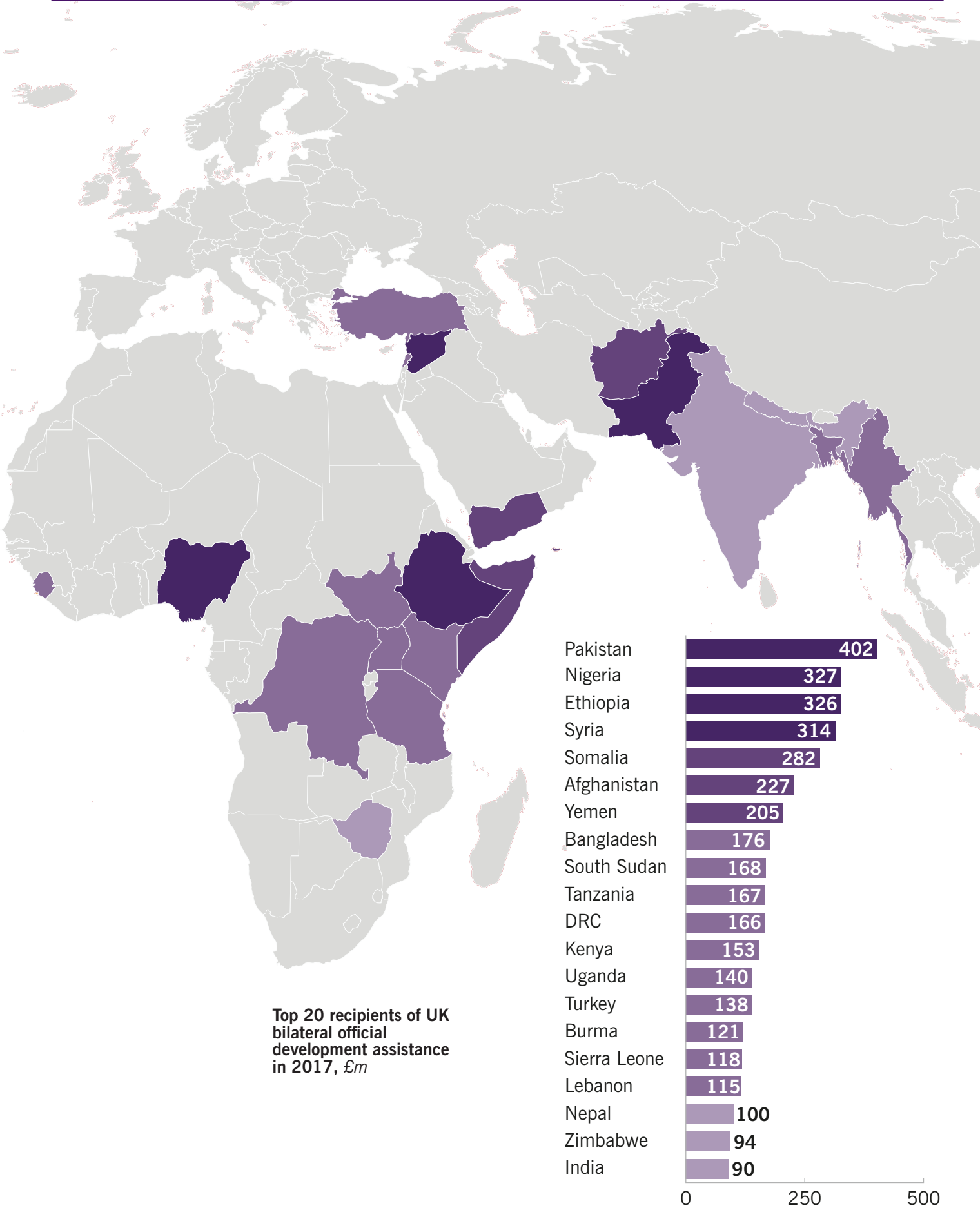
UK ODA levels (£bn) and ODA:GNI ratios (%), 1970-2017



Breakdown of UK ODA by government department and other contributors, 2017



‡CONFLICT, STABILITY AND SECURITY FUND
* INCLUDES HM TREASURY, DEFRA, DEPARTMENT FOR HEALTH, DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION, PROSPERITY FUND, DEPARTMENT FOR WORK AND PENSIONS, HMRC, MOD, EXPORTS CREDITS GUARANTEE, DCMS AND ONS
† OTHER (0.3%, £39m), INCLUDES BBC WORLD SERVICE, SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT, COLONIAL PENSIONS ADMINISTERED BY DFID AND WELSH GOVERNMENT
SOURCES: "GROSS DOMESTIC EXPENDITURE ON RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT, UK: 2017," GOV.UK



GLOBAL AID BEYOND COVID-19

It's not just pandemics—every international emergency requires co-operation

CHRIS LAW SHADOW SNP SPOKESPERSON FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The ongoing response to the Covid-19 pandemic internationally has proven that global co-operation is key, not only in battling the outbreak domestically, but in our approach to delivering development abroad.

Failure to bring the international community together to provide proper and urgent assistance to the developing world will come back to bite us. While we can see infection rates beginning to plateau or fall in the western world, experts predict that Covid-19 infections will not peak in developing nations until July. As UN Secretary General António Guterres has warned, there is a very real risk that without solidarity with developing nations, the virus could mutate unchecked and rebound in a second, deadlier wave. This is worrying especially for countries currently in conflict, such as Yemen, Syria or South Sudan, where in all three it is thought that around half the healthcare facilities are partially or fully destroyed.

In April, I wrote on behalf of the wider SNP parliamentary group to the Secretary of State for International Development to highlight one issue I have been especially concerned about, namely the 71m displaced people around the world, and the many millions of those currently housed in crowded refugee camps. I have welcomed announcements that the UK government will be providing funding to international appeals, but for the world's most at risk, more targeted funding is also necessary. By building on a basis of international co-operation, we increase our chances of leaving no one behind.

Covid-19 will have a potentially catastrophic effect on our approach to other major global challenges, particularly poverty and food insecurity in the developing world. Humanitarian operations have been significantly impacted in their ability to deliver services across the developing world, facing border restrictions and unstable security situations. On top of this, there have also been concerns raised that aid workers themselves have faced distrust, due to fears that they carry or bring the virus into local communities.

At a time when we are seeing a rise in food poverty in places such as east Africa, where many millions may be left without



A climate change protest in Edinburgh. Scotland is the only country with dedicated financial support for a climate justice fund

adequate nourishment due to a horrific locust plague, it is vital that we do not let Covid-19 hamper our ability to work with other international partners to continue to deliver life-saving support. Experts believe we will see global inequality exacerbated by the virus outbreak. I want to see a multilateral, coherent international effort to cancel all external debt payments due to be made in 2020 by poor countries in need, and most urgently for 76 of the world's poorest countries as identified by the World Bank. This should include all bilateral, multilateral and, equally importantly, private debt for the year.

“IT IS VITAL THAT WE DO NOT LET COVID-19 HAMPER OUR ABILITY TO WORK WITH OTHER INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS”

Against this backdrop, the other pressing global emergency is climate change, and we must not be distracted from this by the current crisis. Global co-operation will undoubtedly be hurt by the necessary cancellation or postponement of events critical for international dialogue, such

as the COP26 meeting which was due to be held in Glasgow later this year. I do believe, however, that there are signs of hope in these difficult times. If we can unite around a coherent global approach to tackling Covid-19, then surely this global momentum can be harnessed in the fight for climate justice.

Climate justice recognises that, as our climate continues to warm, freak weather events and unforeseen consequences will continue to strike more frequently and more severely. This is especially true in the developing world, as it is more susceptible due to its lack of suitable infrastructure. The Scottish government has been a global leader on this important issue, and to this day Scotland is the only country with dedicated financial support for a climate justice fund. This success needs to be acknowledged and replicated on a global scale, not least by the UK government, to help build infrastructure in developing nations that will allow them to adapt and prepare.

The science tells us that there is no spare time left. The global emergencies that we together as a world face can only be met with a concerted, multilateral, co-operative approach. For all those facing these challenges, anything less would be failure.



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ASSESSING OUR IMPACT

Amid the worst humanitarian crisis in decades, we must ensure the UK is making a real difference

SARAH CHAMPION CHAIR, INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT SELECT COMMITTEE

As we grapple with an international health crisis, there has never been a more important time to re-assess the priorities for UK aid.

Last year, the UK spent £15.2bn on Official Development Assistance (ODA). The overseas aid budget is an enormous sum of money, but it is needed—from humanitarian relief in emergencies to getting more girls into education, and pressingly, increasing access to clean water, justice and healthcare.

There are many life-changing projects that the UK is leading. But we must make sure that UK aid is money well spent and that it has a real impact, while ensuring it is underpinned by transparency and accountability. Analysing these issues is at the heart of our work on the International Development Committee. Our inquiry on the effectiveness of UK aid is considering how UK ODA is working, and if it is offering value for money as we tackle what could be the worst humanitarian crisis in decades.

It is enshrined in law that reducing poverty must be the primary motivation of the UK's ODA spending. In the 2015 UK Aid Strategy, it was emphasised that UK aid should be spent in the national interest, including strengthening peace and security, and helping countries become more resilient and able to respond to crises. We must not lose sight of this.

We should be proud of the UK's role in international development, and Dfid is envied around the world. It is a critically important "soft power" tool at the government's disposal. We are one of the few countries with an independent aid department, and one of the few countries that has legislated to spend aid as a proportion of gross national income. On the face of it, these measures show our commitment to help end extreme poverty.

Dfid is not the only government department that spends ODA. It is increasingly being spent by other offices and cross-government funds. There are benefits to this—for example, you can harness experience from across government and boost impact through joint working (such as using cross-government expertise to respond to the Zika virus).

But Dfid has longstanding experience of project management that other departments do not. Dfid is also rated "very good" in terms of transparency, so taxpayers know where their money is going. Unfortunately, seven out of the ten ODA-spending departments that were assessed failed to meet the government's aid transparency targets. With the commitment to spend the 0.7 per cent fragmented across Whitehall, we need to see that all UK aid is working as effectively and transparently as possible.

Assessing the impact of aid is difficult. Independent research has shown positive effects on development and living standards. But not all aid-funded projects work, some completely fail, and not all evidence points to positive outcomes.

We are on the brink of a humanitarian crisis as coronavirus looks set to devastate communities in the global south. This is precisely why we have an international development system in place—to avoid humanitarian catastrophes, hunger, and delicate economies collapsing. International aid is under increased strain—and recently the UN has called for a further \$4.7bn from governments as the situation for the world's poorest becomes more desperate.

We know that some of these countries have poorly equipped healthcare systems and limited access to food and aid. Charitable donations are drying up too, as every country around the world is feeling the economic pressures.

We must therefore make sure help is getting to those who need it. However, we have heard from NGOs that their aid allocations are insufficient in tackling coronavirus—they are only receiving £20m of the £200m recently announced by Dfid. NGOs have criticised the lack of flexibility for the funds and have even had to start scaling back some of their programmes to reallocate resources for the coronavirus response.

This is incredibly alarming. We cannot sacrifice the progress in gender equality, environmental protection, education, healthcare provision—work that has taken decades—because the government will not offer flexibility.

The UN expects the peak of the disease in some of the world's most fragile states in three to six months, and the outlook is bleak. It is our moral responsibility to do everything we can as a global community and stop this pandemic destroying vulnerable communities.

The UN has called for a further \$4.7bn to help world's poorest during the coronavirus pandemic





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